



STOLEN HONEY

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BY

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"The Green Shoes of April," etc.



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CHAPTER I

LANGRISHE PROPOSES

IF Damer Langrishe had used an ordinary instead of a fountain pen probably the letter would never have got itself written.

The pauses necessary for the dipping of pen-point in ink might have crystallized his momentary irresolutions into definite indecision. As it was, the easy unchecked flow led him on almost imperceptibly to the abrupt characteristic signature that set seal to the most important document of his life.

Outside, the fierce heat of the Indian summer sun blazed and beat upon the ground with a still intensity. Inside, in the bare, whitewashed room which he called his study, the hot air was disturbed by the creaking waft of a punkah, which swayed to a pause just as Langrishe drew a firm line beneath his signature.

Scantly clad though he was, sweat poured down his forehead in huge drops. He looked up at the still punkah-frill, and shouted an order in Hindustani. The punkah jerked convulsively on again, steadyng by degrees to an even rhythm.

Langrishe mopped his face with a rueful grin.

"It's warm work, proposing by letter," he said to himself. "If I could only see the girl face to face I might

be able to put things in a more attractive light. A letter's so damn bald. You never know how the other person may read it. Still, it's a business proposition more or less. What else could it be, after all? A widower of forty-two—an ugly devil at that—asking a girl of twenty-eight to marry him, a girl he hasn't seen or thought of for at least ten years! Hang it all, I can't send the letter! I won't!"

He drew the sheet of paper towards him, held it for a moment as if he were going to tear it across, hesitated, dropped it, then pushed it a little away from him.

"I'll smoke on it first," he said, taking a cigar from a cedar-lined box at his elbow. "I think the occasion warrants a Corona."

The flare of the match sent a sharp spurt of orange into the hot dusk of the room. As he cupped it in his strong, sunburnt hands to avoid the draught of the punkah, its light flamed with odd effect on his face, accentuating the rather hard lines of mouth and chin, and evoking queer little sparks from the light-blue eyes that peered from beneath tangled, bushy brows. Reddish hair, now subdued from its earlier flamboyance, grew close to a well-shaped head, and a clean-cut nose with sensitive nostrils contradicted the warring jut of the chin.

Taken altogether, it was a strong face and not unattractive. The eyes, which bore the unmistakable look of one who has gazed towards far horizons across great spaces, could soften to tenderness beneath their thick sandy lashes as readily as they could blaze to a sudden hot anger, as evanescent as it was fierce. The sight of children or young creatures evoked the former, cruelty or injustice in any form, the latter.

Women liked Damer Langrishe, although he was essentially a man's rather than a woman's man. The six

years of his widowerhood had left him unsolaced by the easy consolations which feminine India had so willingly proffered.

Truth to tell, he had enjoyed his work and his sport all the more for being untrammelled. He had been blessedly free from women, their complexities, their subtleties, save for a vague undisturbing little daughter at school in England. He had had no desire to replace Helena, the bride of a boyish infatuation, the wife of twelve courteously bored years, until now, when he was faced by the prospect of having a grown-up daughter to look after—a prospect which seemed to have leaped into his pleasant, work-filled life with an appalling suddenness.

"What else am I to do when Dido declares that she won't stay at school any longer?" he mused, his face softening. "This is no place for a girl alone, and I don't want any of the women out here to look after her. I wouldn't trust one of them with my little girl. She'd jib at anything in the nature of a governess or companion, I suppose. Well, she can't turn up her nose at a step-mother. Someone in a definite position of authority. Someone not so very much older than herself. Someone whom I can trust."

He emphasized the word with a puff of blue cigar-smoke, quite unaware of the futility of the statements which he postulated so confidently out of his pathetic ignorance of modern girlhood.

"Whom could I trust if not one of Lucius Carey's daughters?" he went on, touching the fateful letter almost carelessly. "I know that they are straight, well-bred, well-brought-up girls. My cousin Lucius may be a bit of a fool, but he's a gentleman, and Janet, his wife, has a head on her plump shoulders."

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He pulled the letter towards him, and fingered it irresolutely.

"Shall I risk it? All marriage is a risk, if it comes to that. The hottest love-matches smoulder quickest to ashes." He checked a sigh, thinking of his own, whose leaping flames had sunk so suddenly to a barely perceptible warmth. "I've always been rather a believer in the French matrimonial system, which seems to work admirably. It's much the same as that practised by the Irish peasantry, and everyone knows that they are the most virtuous race in Europe. Why is it? It's because they base their married life on a sense of duty rather than on any wild, unbalanced passion. I think it stands to reason that if a decent man and woman, starting on a basis of mutual esteem and respect, agree to marry each other, and to do their duty by each other to the best of their ability, they have a better chance of happiness than if they rushed into matrimony blinded by the urgency of mere physical attraction. Judging by the last letter I had from poor Lucius, his affairs are in a bad way. He'll be glad to get one of the girls off his hands. Five of them, by Gad! and all unmarried. Pamela's getting on, too. Twenty-eight. A sensible age. She's had her fling by this—an innocent enough young fling, I'll swear—and should be ready to settle down. She was a sweet slip of a thing that summer poor Helena and I spent in Ireland ten years ago. Dido took to her then, I remember. What a weed the brat was, all eyes and legs and peaked, white face—a typical Anglo-Indian child! I wonder what she's like now? It's hard to realize that she's grown-up. By Gad! it's five whole years since I've seen her. Five years!"

Damer Langrishe almost let his cigar go out as he

tried to peer across the gulf which suddenly gaped in front of him.

Five years since he had seen his daughter, Dido. Five of the most important years in her life; years of the ripening and nourishing of the green bud of childhood to the opening blossom of womanhood; years of untold possibilities; years which would influence the girl's whole future; years in which absence might have separated them irrevocably.

Langrishe, though not over prone to analysis, frowned at the thought, then shook his head meditatively.

"No, I'm taking no risks," he said to himself. "I know nothing about girls. I must have someone who will help me to understand the child. If she comes at all, Pam must come out and marry me before Dido arrives. She must be here, established, in her rightful place as mistress, before my little monsoon, as I used to call her, is on us. I'll take no risks."

With slightly reinforced cheerfulness, he drew the letter towards him once more, folded it and put it into an envelope, which he addressed to "Miss Pamela Carey, Carrigrennan, Moviddy, Co. Cork, Ireland"; thus unwittingly taking one of the biggest risks that mortal man may venture; thus unimaginatively hazarding the wildest leap into the unfathomed and unknown.

Then, with another shout at the flagging punkah-coolie, and thinking himself a model of wise precaution, Langrishe drew a fresh sheet of paper towards him, and began to write a covering letter to the father of the girl he proposed to marry, leaving it to him as to whether he would deliver his offer of marriage or not.

Once more the fountain pen did its appointed work. The letter was finished, folded, put, with its enclosure,

into a large envelope, and sealed with the Langrishe crest —a lion rampant, with the motto “Vis virtute nascitur,” —a motto which all the Langrishes secretly but honestly tried to translate into action. Certainly what strength Damer of that ilk possessed sprang from his own innate qualities, for of this world’s goods he owned but what he had earned for himself.

He touched the red seal with a questioning forefinger.

“Strength is born of virtue,” he murmured. “Pamela is sure to be a *good* girl, and that’s what matters most. Lucius Carey’s daughter ought to have a sense of duty. He’s the man to inculcate that! Lord, how priggish and old-fashioned it all sounds in these days of self-determination and psycho-analysis! But”—mused Damer Langrishe, with an air of one who, having discovered a profound truth, utters it in one eloquent and original phrase—“goodness is to a woman what perfume is to a flower. Beauty is nothing without it.”

He clapped his hands to summon a servant, desirous of making his decision irrevocable. In spite of his dictum about goodness and beauty, his mind dwelt pleasantly on a swift vision of the girl Pamela, tall and slim and blue-eyed.

The bearer entered, dignified in his white robe, which showed snowy-cool against the dingier wall.

“Huzoor?” he queried, softly guttural.

“Have this posted, Naryan.” Langrishe held out the momentous letter.

“Yes, Huzoor.”

“And, Naryan?”

“Huzoor?”

“Do you know what’s wrong with the world to-day?”

“It is not for the sahib’s servant to say.”

“It can be put in a nutshell, Naryan. The world has

mislaid its sense of duty. That's what has caused all the trouble."

Naryan salaamed profoundly.

"Without a doubt the words of the sahib are words of wisdom. Yet that which is but mislaid may be found again, Huzoor, if it be the will of God."

His gentle optimism touched and pricked his master. As his white robe glimmered, to disappear behind the grass curtain that did duty for a door, Langrishe, seized by his first real misgiving, felt a sudden desire to call him back. Then that unacknowledged but immanent sense of fatalism, which broods like some unseen, puissant presence over the East, laid a restraining finger on him.

"What is to be will be," he murmured, with a movement of shoulders which looked square and strong enough to bear many another burden. "If Pamela comes, she comes, and if she doesn't, she doesn't. That's all about it, except that it will complicate matters infernally if she's too romantic to accept my offer."

It did not occur to him that it might complicate matters considerably more if she were not. He was a man of but one idea, one point of view at the moment. His mind ran in straight, if tolerably broad lines. Life had hitherto been for him a simple, normal affair. Even the subsequent tepidity of his first marriage had borne no unusual feature. Scores of men whom he knew had never touched vital happiness as far as he could see. Married life, for them, jogged along at best; irked and jarred at worst, unless, as sometimes happened, the bond snapped asunder altogether.

The joy and beauty and ecstasy of love he relegated to the raptures of adolescence, over almost as soon as they were realized.

He got up abruptly, pulled the grass curtain aside, and went into the stiff, half-furnished drawing-room of the bungalow.

He stood there for a moment in the shuttered dusk, looking round with new eyes at the bare, high walls, now lizard-haunted, the empty dusty spaces.

Suddenly it occurred to him that it might be pleasant to hear women's voices about the place again, the tap of little heels, the whisper of silks; to see young faces, bright eyes, responsive smiles; to have someone waiting there when he came in, someone of his own once more.

Old desires, long deemed dead, pulsed to unexpected life. Primitive man stirred beneath the layers of civilization and repression, demanding primitive needs, his mate and his lair.

Langrishe gave a half-angry laugh as he strode to the other end of the big stifling room. He laid a hand on a shutter as if to push it open, then paused, remembering the blinding glare that poured upon the deserted compound outside.

"If Pamela comes we might make a garden there next cold weather," he thought. "If——!"

He turned on this and thrust his hands in his trouser pockets. The thin silk of his open shirt clung to his body, but for the moment he forgot the heat, the dust, the flies, the thousand pricking discomforts of an Indian hot weather in the plains.

"If Pamela comes, before God I'll do my best to see that she never regrets it," he vowed.

All at once, as if a lamp had suddenly been lighted in a dark place, Damer Langrishe knew that he had been lonely, not only for the six years of his widowerhood, but for a long day before that.

CHAPTER II

MARRIAGE by POST

"PAM, you're wanted!"

Kitty Carey's clear young voice rang with a high insistence along the corridor, momentarily coming nearer.

"Where? I can't come. I'm washing my hair."

Pamela's answer came after a pause muffled by a tangle of soap-suds tresses.

"In the study. You're to go at once. Mother is there with dad."

Kitty burst excitedly into the shabby bathroom where her elder sister was vigorously washing her hair in a cracked basin.

Redolent of life as an April day, Kitty perched herself with a sudden movement on the edge of a bath which sadly needed repainting. In an upper corner of the wall a dark, spreading stain showed where a shoot outside had leaked. A strip of once glazed drab paper curled forlornly downwards. Pamela always meant to make some paste and fasten it up again when she had time. Two of the small panes of the half-opened window were broken, but so far Pamela had never had sufficient leisure to learn the art of glazing.

"Well, what's the matter now?" she asked with annoyed resignation, glancing at Kitty through a veil of wet dark hair. "It's a queer thing I can't even be let wash my hair in peace."

"It is indeed," answered Kitty, sympathetically, glowing like a rose against her dingy background. "I don't

know what they want you for, Pam, but I think it has something to do with a letter. At least I was teaching Snipe to beg in the hall, when dad came in with a letter in his hand and a funny look in his eyes, and asked me where mother was. Then, after mother had been with him for about ten minutes, she came out looking frightfully red and excited, and told me to tell you to go to her at once."

"A letter?" groaned Pamela. "A bill, you may be sure. Run down, like an angel, Kitty, and tell them if it's Murphy's bill that I haven't a copper till my ducks are sold. If it's Murphy himself——"

"It isn't Murphy. It's a letter, I tell you." Kitty broke into a soft ripple of laughter. "Oh, Pam, maybe it's a surprise of some sort!"

Kitty's blue eyes danced. She was young enough to love surprises. Pamela, at twenty-eight, was old enough to dread them.

Slowly, almost reluctantly, she poured the last can of cold rain-water over her head, squeezed out the rope of soft dark hair, from which the wetting had momentarily robbed its curl, took a bath-towel off the rickety horse and wrapped it round her head, turban-wise. Slipping her faded blue cotton frock over her white shoulders she turned to face Kitty with a look of resignation.

"If they're by themselves I can go down as I am," she said.

Her voice was soft, but it lacked the lilt of Kitty's. Her eyes, deep sapphire as the young girl's and shaded by the same dark curling lashes, had more depth if less sparkle than her sister's. Her nose (which she hated) had begun by being straight but turned up with rather a provocative tilt at the end, and her generous mouth

seemed made rather for love and laughter than the tight lines into which the exigencies of life sometimes compressed it. There were also lines, faint as yet, but still unmistakable, across her forehead, and at the corners of her eyes lurked the light humorous traceries which laughter brings early even to young faces.

Pamela Carey was more attractive than really pretty. There was character in her level brows, her firm chin, the wide curve of her mouth. Sincerity shone in her clear, straight gaze: the grip of her strong little hand presaged a friendship not too easily won, but well worth the winning. She was above the average height, slim, small-boned, and light of movement. Her white skin was prone to freckle. At the moment a faint brown dusting of the obnoxious spots powdered nose and cheeks.

The folds of the Turkish towel about her head lent a curious severity, a touch of aloofness almost, to her aspect. She tucked her arm through her sister's.

"Come along, Kit. We may as well know the worst," she said ruefully.

She hated appearing before her parents in her present guise. She knew that her father would make his stock remark: "Aha, my Eastern lady!" and that her mother would say with rounded eyebrows: "What! Washing your hair again?"

In Mrs. Carey's eyes her girls' tendency to wash their hair "in season and out of season," as she said plaintively, amounted almost to a mania. As there were usually five of them ready to perform this ablutionary duty an "Eastern lady" was very often to be seen wandering among the cool, dim passages at Carrigrennan.

Pamela went reluctantly down the wide shallow stairs, an anxious little frown creasing her forehead. This

hasty summons to a family conclave touched the portentous. She had not been bidden thus to the study since the awful day when her only brother Randall had come home unexpectedly from college pouring an avalanche of bills upon them, which had completely swept away the family monetary resources.

She checked a sigh at the remembrance. Dear old Randall! He had been foolish, thoughtless only, and he had made good afterwards. He had given more than any wretched money could buy—his life for his country. Pamela felt, with a sick throb of longing, that she would give everything she had in the world, everything she might ever have, pinch and scrape to the end of her days, if only she could see the twinkle in his merry eyes or hear the sound of his gay tuneless whistle once more. Only one year in age had separated them. They had been near in spirit as well. Now he was gone.

She paused in the big square hall and took up her father's tweed cap, which lay with his stick thrown carelessly on the round table in the centre. She put it down again aimlessly.

"Did the letter come by the second post, Kitty, or did it come by hand?" she asked anxiously.

"I don't know. Dad must have met it in the avenue, however it came," Kitty answered airily. "What does it matter, anyhow? I'm dying to know what was in it. Aren't you?"

"No. Don't go in for a minute, Kitty."

"Why not?"

Kitty looked at her sister curiously, wondering why she hesitated.

"I don't know."

Pamela turned away her head, then stooped to caress a red setter who was lying half under the table.

Her movement seemed to loose a torrent of dogs upon her. In through the door rushed two terriers, and from the centre of an old sofa, near the window, where he had been basking, apparently asleep, in a shaft of dust-filled sunlight, floundered a great brindled bull-dog.

"Down, boys! Down, Rufus! Down, Punch!"

Pamela rose from the swirl of dogs, her white turban knocked slightly to one side, with rakish effect.

"Oh, come on," cried Kitty. "They'll only be annoyed if you keep them waiting."

She ran across the hall and opened the study door. To her gay inconsequent youth the unknown held all the glamour of a fairy-tale. The rosy mists of the future might at any moment thin to reveal the magical. There was nothing that might not happen, any day at any hour. She had no patience with Pamela's doubts and tremors.

"Here she is!" she cried excitedly. "She's been washing her hair."

"Oh, of course," said Mrs. Carey, but with more resignation than actual disapproval.

She was a short stout woman, with a comely face set upon an almost ovoid body.

"Humpty-dumpty" her irreverent youngest daughter called her, but as Kitty always hugged her when she said it, the disrespectful jest bore no sting.

The brown-walled, book-lined room looked cool and dim after the glare of the hall outside. Pamela, glancing from one parent to the other, was aware of an atmosphere of tension, of scarcely subdued excitement.

"Kitty needn't stay, need she?"

Whatever had to be faced, she felt she could bear it better alone with the elders who still treated her as a child, although they were always ready to consult her in times of stress.

"Oh, Pam, how mean of you!" Kitty's brightness clouded.

"Pam is quite right. This—matter—concerns her alone," said Lucius Carey, looking up from the knee-hole desk behind which he had entrenched himself.

Thus barricaded, he felt master of the situation. In his shabby old leather armchair he knew that he was always more or less at the mercy of his women folk.

Thin and spare, with once fair, greying hair, he peered from beneath tangled brows with the light blue eyes of his kinsman, Damer Langrishe; but whereas Langrishe looked across great spaces to distant realities, Lucius Carey, with the vision of a dreamer, looked ever for horizons which were not there.

A gentleman farmer, as the quaint phrase has it, he was so much more of a gentleman than a farmer that the Carrigrennan acres now yielded but a bare subsistence out of their former abundance.

"Yes," he repeated musingly, his veined hand on an opened letter, "This concerns Pamela alone."

"I'm sure it concerns us all, Lucius," said Mrs. Carey, with a vibration in her tone which made Pamela dart a quick glance at her.

"Then if it concerns us all I may stay, mayn't I, mummy?" pleaded Kitty, with saucy confidence.

"Indeed you may not," answered her mother, failing her unexpectedly. "How many more times will you have to be told to run away, Kitty?"

"I think you're all most frightfully mean," Kitty declared, marching out of the room with flushed face and tear-stained eyes, banging the door behind her.

Lucius Carey started. "I have a good mind to bring that child back and make her shut the door quietly. She's getting too old for that sort of thing."

"Never mind her now, Lucius. She only wanted to see that it was fastened properly." Mrs. Carey fidgetted on her chair. Her plump hands fluttered and trembled. "Tell Pam the news, like a good man, and give her her letter."

"What letter?" asked Pamela, a spark of hope, of repressed youth stirring within her. "Is it an invitation anywhere?"

After all, there could be nothing really terrifying in a letter which concerned her alone. She had no personal debts. Out of what she called her "fowl money," she paid for everything she wore. There was no unpleasant secret lurking in her past waiting to spring unexpectedly upon her. The only secrets she had ever had were her dreams, and those concerned nobody but herself.

"It is," announced Mrs. Carey, her eyes sparkling, her round cheeks shaking with suppressed triumph.

"Janet, my dear——"

"I must tell her, Lucius, or I'll explode. How you can sit there so calm and unconcerned passes my understanding," cried Mrs. Carey. "It is an invitation, Pam, my dear. An invitation to go to—India!"

"To India? Me?" cried Pamela, ungrammatically, sinking down on the nearest chair. "Mother, you're joking?"

India, the land of colour, romance, glamour! The very deepest hidden of all her secret dreams!

The colour ebbed from Pamela's cheeks, leaving her face white and sharpened to an incredulous intensity. Her eyes darkened and widened.

"I am not, indeed. Am I, Lucius?" Mrs. Carey turned to her husband for support. "Now you can tell her the rest."

Her breath came quickly. Her brown eyes were

bright and darting as those of a bird. She folded her hands across her ample frontage, and looked triumphantly from husband to daughter. Not since the day when Lucius himself had proposed to her had she known such an ineffable moment.

"Your mother has only told you half," said Mr. Carey slowly. "Of course there are conditions attached to such a proposition——"

"Oh, Lucius, how you drag things out!" interrupted Mrs. Carey impatiently. "Pam, my dear, it is an offer of marriage, a proposal from your cousin Damer Langrishe."

Pamela caught her breath; her normal, working-day world suddenly disintegrated to a spinning chaos.

"A proposal—from Damer Langrishe—for me?" she jerked out disconnectedly.

"Yes, indeed. He has written to your father. A very proper letter. He wants you to go out to India in October to marry him."

"But—but—I don't know him! He doesn't know me!" gasped Pamela.

"Now, Pam, don't be foolish. He knows us, and he knows all about you——"

"He doesn't know a single thing about me! How could he?" Pamela cried, colour rushing back to her cheeks in a flame.

Lucius Carey felt that it was time for him to interfere. He lifted his head and straightened his bent shoulders.

"You had better listen to what your cousin says, before you go jumping to rash conclusions, Pamela," he interposed quietly. "He wrote to me and left it to my own judgment as to whether I should give you this letter or not. After due consideration——"

Across Pamela's mind flashed a rebellious—"Ten minutes, according to Kitty!"

"We decided that you must choose for yourself."

The words sounded tolerant and reasonable, but in her mother's unconcealed exultance and the spark of hope which unwontedly quickened her father's mild depressed face, Pamela saw Fate closing in upon her.

"They jump at the chance of getting rid of me," she thought, a swift unusual bitterness momentarily clouding her real affection for them.

Gulping down resentment with an effort she asked quietly:

"What else does Damer say?"

"Why don't you give her her own letter, Lucius?"

"Oh, he has written to me as well?" Pamela groped for the tangible in her bewilderment.

"Yes." Mr. Carey handed the greyish foreign envelope, whose dull exterior hid the unmistakable jewel of Pamela's first proposal.

Her fingers closed on it possessively, but she made no attempt to open it.

"Aren't you going to read Damer's letter?" asked Mrs. Carey, simmering with curiosity.

"Not here," answered Pamela, holding the letter close to her, as if she thought her mother might attempt to wrest it from her.

"Poor Damer must be lonely out there," Mrs. Carey continued. "He wants companionship, especially now that Dido is grown-up and going out to him."

"I'd have thought he'd want it less than ever for that reason," Pamela murmured.

"You remember Dido? She took a great fancy to you when they were here ten years ago. So did Damer."

"Oh, no, mother, he didn't."

"He must have, Pam. Look at him, proposing for you now! Ah, he's one of those quiet sort of men who never show what they really feel."

"But, mother, his wife was alive then?" Pamela cried in eager protest.

"Surely, Pam, he might take a fancy to his own little cousin without your insinuating that I meant anything nasty! What young people are coming to nowadays, I'm sure I don't know!"

"Janet, my dear, you're straying from the point," interposed Mr. Carey. "To put the matter in a nutshell, Pam, Damer wants you to marry him, and, as your mother says, be a companion to himself and his motherless girl. He does not pretend to any wild romance. He knows that, as my daughter, you are a well-brought-up girl, a lady in the best sense of that much abused word. He is a Langrishe. No more need be said about that. We may take it for granted that he is a straight, honourable gentleman."

"That's all very well!" cried Pamela, feeling the mesh of the net. "But what do you know about him, really, Dad—his thoughts, his feelings, all the little things that are so immensely important."

"Now you are being absurd, my child. Little things may be irksome or irritating, but they are always trivial and never really important. What exactly do you mean?" asked Lucius Carey, with an air of infinite patience and forbearance.

"Pam means has he any queer little habits that might annoy her?" put in Mrs. Carey eagerly.

"No, I don't!" cried Pamela, stifling a tendency to hysterical laughter.

"Then what do you mean, Pamela?"

Two perturbed faces regarded her. This was not the way in which they had expected her to receive such a gift from heaven as a proposal of marriage.

Pamela, looking from one to the other, was struck anew by the resemblance of her father to a horse, and her mother to an owl. She gave a little nervous giggle, swiftly checked, suddenly hating herself for her untimely flippancy.

"I don't know," she answered lamely.

"I should think you didn't!" said Mrs. Carey, with an attempt at severity, which the wonder and excitement of the news melted after an instant. "Oh, Pam, to think of your getting married after all! Damer will make the most satisfactory settlements. He's doing awfully well at his engineering job in India. He has his life heavily insured, he says. A splendid settlement!" Her rosy face beamed. Her round eyes were suddenly suffused with happy tears.

"It would be an untold relief to my mind to think that one of you was comfortably provided for," said Lucius Carey, in a broken voice. "Farming doesn't pay nowadays. Young Jan, of course, has her nursing. If you were married that would leave only three to provide for."

"And perhaps you'd be able to do something for the younger girls. If you had Babs and Kitty out in India they wouldn't be long on your hands, I'm sure."

"And you would at least have a home to offer your sisters if worst came to worst."

"That's the beauty of Damer's being a relation. He'd never object to doing what he could for his own kith and kin."

The soft, persistent antiphon beat like brazen gongs upon Pam's brain, bewildering her. A fierce, unwonted

desire to assert her own personality seized her, arming her for protest. She got up suddenly, still clasping her letter.

"Then you urge me to marry a man whom I don't know, and who doesn't know me, so that I may make a comfortable home for the girls later on?" she demanded.

"Pam! There's no urging. Aren't we leaving it entirely to you?" Mrs. Carey's voice rang reproachfully.

"God forbid that I should force any child of mine into an unwelcome marriage!" ejaculated Mr. Carey, in hurt surprise. "But it's rather absurd of you to persist in saying that you and Damer don't know each other, Pam. Why, he's your own cousin, and he spent a month with us ten years ago!"

"I was a child then!" Pamela cried. "And we *don't* know each other. Not the real me or the real him." She stopped abruptly.

Lucius Carey shook his head disapprovingly and waved a protesting hand.

"Ah, these days of introspection and self-analysis!" he sighed. "When I was young we were content to take things as they came, simply and naturally. We did not want to dissect everything, to probe incessantly beneath the surface. We had no desire to 'tear a passion to tatters'!"

"Hadn't you?" asked Pamela, in a queer tone. "Perhaps you forget."

She turned towards the door. Her mother's voice followed her with an unwonted asperity.

"Where are you going to, Pam?"

"To my room. I want to think—this—over."

"Yes, think things over, my dear," said Mr. Carey judicially. "And remember, Pam, that it is a matter entirely for yourself to decide."

"Entirely, Lucius?" queried Mrs. Carey, with an odd inflection in her voice.

"Yes, entirely, Janet. I am quite confident that Pam will make a wise decision."

"That's more than I am," said Pamela abruptly.

She left the room, closing the door behind her with a quiet finality that held more of protest than Kitty's bang.

Janet Carey looked across the desk at her husband, her face working.

"Wasn't it disappointing, the way she took it?" she exclaimed. "I declare, children are nothing but a worry and annoyance from beginning to end!"

She laid her head on her outstretched arms and began to cry. Lucius Carey had not seen her give way like this since her son's death. He leaned over the desk and patted the heaving shoulder nearest him.

"There, there, my dear, don't cry," he said soothingly. "Pamela is not a fool."

"Ah, Lucius!" she choked, gulped and sat up, her cheeks wet and blotched. "I'm afraid she's as romantic as I was at her age."

"Nonsense, my dear!" returned her husband, with a dry chuckle. "At Pamela's age you were the mother of five children, and all your romance was over."

Mrs. Carey dried her eyes and smiled—an illuminating smile that gave unexpected character to her plump face. "Sometimes I'm not quite sure that it's all over yet," she said very softly. "Though Heaven knows, Lucius, that I often wonder if you're not more aggravating than all the children put together!"

"Sometimes I think the same of you, Janet. Still I wouldn't change you for any other woman in the world." Mr. Carey got up stiffly and went round to where his wife sat.

He put his arm round her, half-shamefacedly. She looked up at him, her eyes still swimming. Awkwardly she lifted herself up out of her chair and laid her wet cheek against his.

"Nor I you for any other man," she whispered.

Suddenly her first qualm pierced her. By urging Pamela into an arranged marriage was she not robbing her of all this, that half-passionate, half-maternal love which is, perhaps, the highest expression of married happiness for a woman? For a moment she felt vaguely troubled, vaguely conscience-stricken at the thought. Then, because she was an unimaginative woman and had few moments of real vision, she brushed the pricking doubts aside. Like many another middle-aged woman who has married for love, she saw no drawback to less romantic unions for her children.

She moved away from where she and Lucius stood rather awkwardly together, a little uncomfortable at their unusual plunge into sentiment.

"I hope to goodness Pam will have her hair dry by lunch time," she said, with a sharpness due to the doubt so hastily dismissed.

CHAPTER III

PAMELA SHUTS THE DOOR ON ROMANCE

PAMELA, her unopened letter safe in the seclusion of her pocket, fled up the stairs as if she were pursued, hoping with a fervour that almost turned desire to prayer that she might not meet one of the girls on her way to sanctuary.

It was a pleasant habit of the younger Careys to relegate all tiresome duties to Pamela on the plea that the performance of such was "the privilege of the eldest!" Long ago she had claimed one real privilege—a room to herself. She felt more thankful than ever at the thought of it now: it was the one place where she might sometimes be alone. It loomed before her as a well in the desert to the thirsty traveller.

She sped breathlessly along the empty corridor. She was almost there. Her hand was actually on the door-handle when Kitty pounced on her from behind and caught her arm.

"Pam, what is it? You've got to tell me."

"I can't. It's—nothing," gasped Pamela.

Kitty flung back her head in scorn.

"Do you take me for a baby or an idiot? It's a very funny nothing that makes you look like that."

"Like what?"

"Like—like an excited banshee!" exclaimed Kitty. "All eyes and gaping mouth in a white face. Don't tell me again that it's nothing!"

"Well, it's everything, then?" cried Pamela. "Let me go, Kitty. You'll know soon enough."

She jerked her arm away, opened the door, darted inside and closed and locked it in the disappointed girl's face.

"Very well, then, Miss Pamela! Keep your old secret! I'm sure *I* don't want to hear it!" called Kitty childishly through the keyhole.

Pamela took no notice. She stood for a moment just inside the door, panting and glancing round the dear familiar room as if she had never seen it before.

It was bare and comfortless according to modern standards of luxury. The stained floor had but strips of carpet near bed and dressing-table; but the wardrobe, chest-of-drawers, wash-stand, and round-framed mirror were of beautifully polished mahogany, and the jug and basin stood out against the cream distempered walls with the rich glow of quaint-patterned iron-stone china. The open window looked across the yard to the kitchen garden. From it Pamela could keep an eye on her heterogeneous assortment of fowls who picked and scratched or waddled among the cobble-stones below.

She drew forward a creaking basket-chair and set it with its back to the window. Hastily unpinning the towel from her head, she shook her hair free and sat down in the sunshine to dry it.

Then she took the letter from her pocket and really looked at it for the first time.

The superscription pleased her both in manner and matter. There was character in the firm down strokes and a hint of personality in the formation of the letters. The clarity of the address left no doubt as to whom the letter was intended for. In some subtle way it expressed the very thought which had risen with such

blindfold self-confidence to Damer Langrishe's mind as he wrote it:

"I am taking no risks!"

Pamela sat there hesitant, one finger slipped under the flap of the envelope, watching her dreams take flight. Like most young women of her age, she had had tentative friendships, fugitive fancies which, meaning nothing, had led to nothing: but always at the back of her mind, throughout the days of petty worries, hard work and little nagging economies, had lurked the hope of the big thing, the real thing coming to her at last. The glow of possible romance had irradiated the greyness of monotony and lent an iridescence to routine.

With the opening of this letter, the door to romance would be closed. There could be no glow, no iridescence about a prosaic proposal like this: a purely business proposition, she told herself scornfully, letting the letter fall in her lap and flicking it with a disdainful finger.

Was this to be the end of her dreams? This unromantic marriage, arranged as might be Biddy Clancy's down in the village with a farmer from a neighbouring townland whom she had never even seen. How often had she turned up her delicate nose at such matches, scorning them with all the force of her cherished dreams, her secret ineffable visions? Was it possible that she, Pamela Carey—already, though she did not realize it, looked upon with a slight contemptuous pity by the said villagers, who wondered among themselves, "When at all would poor Miss Pam be going off?"—could descend from the heights on which she, albeit unconsciously, had stood, to this sordid mating?

Yet, even as she fenced with herself, evading decision, she knew in her inmost heart that choice was already made: knew that it had been made for her by her

mother's round worried face, the look of eager relief in her father's eyes, the momentary straightening of his bent shoulders, as of a burden being lifted from them.

If this thing meant so much to them—the door of Romance shut with a clang! Pamela tore the envelope open and took out the key which locked it.

It never occurred to her that that which locks can also open. No such easy consolation came to her mind as she read the terse sentences eagerly, looking for something to reassure or to repel, she did not quite know which.

There was little enough in the letter:

"MY DEAR PAMELA" (it ran, plunging at once into the heart of the matter). "Will you marry me?

"I know that I am asking a great thing of you, especially as I cannot plead a deep love as my excuse. Still, if you will do me the honour of being my wife, I will do my best, so help me, God, to see that you never regret it.

"If I could only see you face to face my wooing would not be so bald, but words are meaningless things, and anyhow, I have no skill in juggling with them. We may, at least, if you consent, start our married life on a basis of mutual friendship and respect, which I feel sure will soon ripen, on my part, to a very real and lasting affection.

"Will you trust me as I shall trust you, and come out to me in October? You need not be afraid, Pam. I shall take good care of you.

"Cable me your answer and I shall at once make arrangements for your escort.

"Dido, I am sure, will appreciate your companionship as warmly as will

"Yours in all sincerity,

"DAMER LANGRISHE."

"At any rate, he doesn't pretend anything," breathed

Pamela on a sigh of relief. "And, thank God, he makes no attempt to bribe me! He's an honest man. A straightforward man, and I always liked his nose and the shape of his head!"

She sent her mind back through the years searching for the face of this, the first man who had ever really wanted to marry her: peering with that strangely altered point of view from which a woman regards a man who has suddenly turned from friend to lover.

Out of the past it leaped at her with a startling clarity: square, rugged, humorous, nearly always a glint of laughter in the light blue eyes. Langrishe had laughed a good deal while he was at Carrigrennan. Its crowd of wild, high-spirited youngsters had amused him, and he had been almost a boy amongst them.

Pamela had a kaleidoscopic vision of tennis, bathing, picnics, of all the sweets in Moviddy being brought up; of a leggy, skinny, dark-eyed Dido, for ever tumbling into mischief and being helped out again; of long sunny days filled to the brim with fun and frolic; of a great blank and quiet when the Langrishes had gone away. Looking back, she suddenly realized how small a place Cousin Helena claimed in the retrospect.

She tried to remember more vividly, but could recapture only a faint recollection of a fair, faded woman, aloof and a little supercilious—"put on," as was the Carey word for any affectation—whom Dad and Mother were left to entertain. Two irrelevant fragments of memory flashed back: one, that Cousin Helena had worn a hat with streamers—which was the last word in "put-on-ness," to the country youngsters—the other, her languid acceptance of Damer's unfailing attentions.

Pamela recalled, with a quick flush, her girlish indignation over one little episode, when on one of their rambles

Damer had picked a cluster of honeysuckle, faint rose and cream trumpets, sending forth their fairy music in sweetness, and given it to his wife on their return.

She had taken the perfumed sprays and dropped them on the ground after one sniff.

"You know I don't like these strongly scented things," she had said.

"I'm sorry," he returned. "Honeysuckle has always seemed to me one of the best of the country smells."

"I like it, daddy!" Dido had cried, and rescuing the disdained blossoms the child had stuck them, one by one, round the crown of her shady hat.

Pamela had loved her for it and hated Cousin Helena. Forgotten for ten years, it was strange how the little incident still had power to sting her to resentment.

"But Cousin Helena's dead. I mustn't think ill of her now," she mused, putting a hand to her hot cheek, and shaking out her hair. "And Damer wants to marry me. Why me? Why on earth did he choose me and not some one whom he really knew?"

She took up the letter again and read it through for the second time, feeling as if in her first hasty perusal she must have missed some clue to the reason for his inexplicable choice.

One sentence stood out newly: a sentence which had flowed almost without volition from Langrishe's pen; a sentence which, in its very simplicity, suddenly appealed to the girl more than anything else in the letter:

"You need not be afraid, Pam. I shall take good care of you."

He certainly had taken good care of Cousin Helena; he would be sure to take good care of her, too, if——

Once one had banished dreams and visions, and shut

the door on golden-veiled Romance, there was something rather comforting in that assurance.

In all her twenty-eight years Pamela Carey could never remember having been taken care of. When she was little there was always a baby to help to look after. When she came back from school there were her father and mother with a dozen claims and a flock of younger ones to be considered. It was "the privilege of the eldest" to look after the little ones; to give up, once she came to years of discretion, little treats, little pleasures, which meant so much more to the younger girls, Mrs. Carey declared.

"You won't mind, Pam? After all, you've had your fling!"

What a mild, what a deadly uninteresting fling it had been!

A little hunting, a few dances, a good many tennis-parties—and then the cataclysm of war, which had taken toll of Pamela's girlhood, as of so many others. With it, always the need for economy, always the burden of debt.

She looked once again at the letter with a tightening of her soft mouth, a sparkle of defiance in her blue eyes.

"Aren't they queer?" she thought to herself. "They think it's perfectly all right, just because Damer is well off and a relation! They never imagine for a moment that we may be poles apart in everything that counts. Damer doesn't either. He's just as bad as they are. Can I do it? Dare I?" She hid her hot face in her hand, her mind still filled with resentful wonder at the attitude of her parents. "Those two, who admittedly married for love, think any man is good enough for me, just because he happens to be a good match!"

"Everyone else will think just the same. The girls

will probably envy me, think how lucky I am. I don't believe that anyone but myself will see the sordidness of it all. While I——” She dropped her hands from her face and looked round the room with the questing, frightened eyes of a trapped animal. Suddenly her mood changed as she tried to visualize the result of a refusal of Damer's offer.

“They'd think me mad, of course. Mother would say sorrowfully, ‘Well, Pam, I *am* disappointed in you!’ Dad would look more bent and worn than ever. ‘Far be it from me to force any child of mine into a distasteful marriage, but——’ It's that ‘but’ I couldn't stand. It would be always there—always!—like a sign-post pointing to what might have been, until I become a real old maid, grinding my life out here, always pulling the devil by the tail, and waiting for what would never happen, most likely!”

She rose abruptly and began to brush out the sun-warm tangles of her hair. The even strokes of the brush helped her to return to her normal poise.

“After all, a home of my own and a man to take care of me aren't to be despised,” she thought. “Here am I, always wanting something to happen, and now, when something really exciting and thrilling and adventurous happens, I'm half afraid to take advantage of it. What is the use of waiting for the best? Isn't it better to make the most of the second-best? How many people ever get the big thing, the real thing? If they do, they hide it pretty well! Most people only just jog along —trot-trot, trot-trot. Damer and I will jog along, too, on our quiet nags, Friendship and Respect. No wide-winged Pegasus for us!” She gave a half-rueful little laugh, and brushed her hair until it stood out like a dark silky nimbus.

She felt very old, very worldly-wise, as she stood there, nerving herself to do the obvious, the expected thing, but in reality she looked younger than usual with the veil of her hair softening the rather thin contours of her face.

"But I, being poor, have only dreams," she quoted softly to herself. "'Tisn't as if I could do anything if I went out into the world to earn my bread. It's only a mother's help I'm fit for, and I'm of more use as that here. Poor mother!

"'Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.' Well, she's trodden on them so heavily, now, that they're dead once for all!"

It was not for nothing that Damer Langrishe had deduced a sense of duty in Lucius Carey's eldest daughter. It was the silver cord that bound together the bundle of moods and impulses, faults and virtues that went to make the tangled temperament of Pamela.

It held now, as it was to hold throughout her life, whether her conception of that great grey angel were mistaken or not.

She was late for luncheon. The family was seated when she entered, an old Panama hat crammed well down on her head.

Mrs. Carey looked up at her apprehensively.

"Why, Pam, where have you been?"

"Down to the village," Pamela answered, slipping into her place at table.

"What on earth were you doing at the village?"

"Burning my boats," said Pamela shortly.

"Lucius!" Mrs. Carey looked at her husband in nervous appeal. "Do you know what she means?"

Mr. Carey glanced towards his daughter, a quick fear in his heart.

Pam had at times acted very impulsively, had been difficult to influence, to deter.

"Please explain yourself, Pamela," he said, his quiet tone a trifle strained.

A quiver of excitement pulsed round the table.

"I should have thought my meaning was obvious." The girl's voice rang clear, and a little hard. "If you must have it put into bald English, I have been sending a cablegram to Damer Langrishe."

The tension grew almost palpable.

"What did you say, Pam?" Mrs. Carey's whisper was nearly inaudible, each eyebrow rounded to an arch of anxiety.

Mr. Carey said nothing, but the hand which held the carving-knife clutched its ivory handle so tightly that the knuckles stood out white and sharp.

One glance was enough for Pamela. Here was her freedom of choice, her perfect liberty to make her own decision. She almost laughed aloud at the thought. Why, the matter had been decided before she ever stepped across the threshold of the study. She tilted her head high.

"I said that I would marry him, of course," she answered.

CHAPTER IV

BURNT BOATS

THE news of Pamela Carey's engagement spread throughout the county with almost as inexplicable a swiftness as if the birds of the air had carried the matter.

Indeed, in Ireland, a prospective marriage has that same subtle power of attraction which a shoal of fry possesses for the sea-bird.

One moment, and the sea is calmly hyaline; the next, it is crisped by an infinitesimal silver multitude, and out of the void swoop flurries of wings, white, grey and brown, while up from below jerk the snaky black heads of cormorants, impelled by the mysterious hunting instinct.

So, into the eventless monotony of days at Carrigrennan eddied an endless succession of visitors, to wonder, to congratulate, to envy, perhaps even secretly to decry.

"After all, Pam Carey is getting on. She must be thirty at least. She'd be glad to take anyone now, let alone a man old enough to be her father," whispered Dolly Walters, to her friend, Minnie Ashton; a murmur fraught with all the disappointment of years of frustrated matrimonial hopes.

Pamela found herself a centre of attraction for the first time since the Hunt Ball, at which she had made her debut; and being but twenty-eight, with an enthusiasm or two still uncurled was human enough to enjoy the novel sensation. Yet at times it jarred upon some

inner sense of delicacy, crudely, almost unbearably.

"It's positively indecent, the fuss they make," she said one day to Kitty, who, being the last of her babies, was in some ways nearer to her heart than any of the other sisters. "You'd think that no one in the world had ever got engaged before. And a marriage of convenience at that!"

"Oh, Pam, how can you say such a thing?"

"Well, what else is it?"

"I don't know, I'm sure," Kitty admitted reluctantly. "But nothing as horrid as that sounds. 'Tisn't as if Damer wasn't a relation, and you hadn't known him all your life——"

"Everyone harps on the fact of his being a relation, as if he were the whole table of affinities rolled into one." interrupted Pamela crossly. "Whereas, he's only dad's second cousin once removed and scarcely a relation at all. I don't believe that second cousins count anywhere but in Ireland."

"Don't they?" said Kitty dubiously, looking at this unfamiliar Pam with wondering blue eyes.

Suddenly she sidled up to her in the old, caressing, baby way, rubbing her soft cheek against her sister's coaxingly. "Sure, it's not in earnest you are, Pam, about poor Damer? It is a comfort to have him a relation and not a stranger, isn't it? And you do like him a little, don't you?"

"Of course I like him," cried Pam hotly. "Nothing in the world would induce me to marry him if I didn't."

"Then that's that," cried Kitty with a relieved hug.

"Oh, is it?" murmured Pam darkly.

"Now Pam——"

"Oh, very well, then."

What Pamela could not explain to anybody, could not even put into words to herself, was a vague, troubled feeling, as of holy places rudely trodden in, high sanctities desecrated, golden possibilities tarnished by this prosaic marriage she was making.

When Kitty conjured her to come downstairs and see the lovely bébé crochet that Mary Clancy had brought, she felt as if she had sold her great birthright of love for a yard of Irish lace.

Yet she went, at once paradoxically hesitant and eager. To her, who rarely had new clothes, and never enough of them, this sudden abundance was like a wild dream come true. The stark fact of her marriage, her reluctant sin against love, was clothed in a richness that hid for the moment anything ugly or elemental.

The trappings—Damer's ring, a dewdrop-clear half-hoop of diamonds; his cable: "Thank you, my dear," which reached her in an incredibly short time after she had despatched her own thrilled her in spite of herself. In some foolish way she felt glad that he had said "my dear" instead of just "dear." She could not have told whether it was the opulence implied by the lavish use of the unnecessary word or the sense of quiet protectiveness suggested by the possessive pronoun. She just liked it, that was all.

It and the ring, which she could not help feeling looked rather incongruous on her useful little brown hand, added to her temporary sense of importance.

Pamela was clear-eyed enough to realize the transience of her position. She had seen, over and over again, among her own acquaintances, how quickly the glamour of the bridal merges into the quiet background of everyday married life. She had not yet sufficient experience to know that it is then that the real human drama begins,

with its clash of temperaments, its mergings, its divergencies.

Yet at times some swift foreboding would pierce the cloud of illusion in which she enwrapped herself.

After one such shaft of illumination she sought her mother.

The creases in Janet Carey's plump face had broadened to smiles, the arch of her eyebrows rounded to a pitying sympathy for those other mothers whose daughters were not making such admirable matches as her own. For in her Alnaschar-visions she saw a five-fold vista of white-robed brides, beginning excellently with Pamela and ending brilliantly with Kitty.

These iridescent bubbles Pamela broke with the careless touch of reality.

She found her mother in the big cool pantry off the hall, covering jampots with the quickness of long practice. The fitting on of those white covers offered no obstacle to the dreaming of dreams, which was Mrs. Carey's deliberate amusement by day and her subconscious solace at night. She looked up now, her whole face a startled question mark, at Pamela's abrupt entrance.

"Mother," the girl demanded, without preface or preliminary. "Am I doing right in marrying Damer without loving him?"

Mrs. Carey's hazel eyes blinked at the suddenness of the thrust; but ever since the day of Damer's first letter, and Pamela's subsequent "queerness," she had been on the lookout for some such question as this.

"Perfectly right, Pam darling," answered the woman who had threatened to starve herself to death if she were not allowed to marry Lucius Carey, in those long-ago days, a penniless younger son with no prospect of ever

succeeding to the broad acres of Carrigrennan. "You may not be passionately in love with dear Damer——"

"Whom you used to call 'an ugly, red-headed devil' before there was any possibility of his becoming your son-in-law!" flashed Pamela.

"Pam! That's not the way to speak to your mother! Damer may not be a beauty, but he's a good, trustworthy man, and a gentleman, and you're a lucky girl to get him."

"How do you know, mother?"

"Know what?"

"That Damer's a good trustworthy man?"

"Ah, now, Pam, you're being tiresome," said Mrs. Carey, striving after patience. "Isn't he your own father's second cousin, and wasn't he staying here for a month a couple of years ago?"

"Ten years ago."

"What's ten years, if it comes to that? The best way in the world to get to know a person is to stay in the house with him."

"Damer may be quite different now from what he was ten years ago. I am."

"Ah, no, he's not," returned Mrs. Carey, ignoring the personal challenge. "Men of his age don't change like that. Besides, we've known him always. Isn't he——"

"Bounded on the north, south, east and west by that blessed second-cousinship!" muttered Pamela with a rebellious flash of her deep blue eyes.

Their spark set alight a fire of apprehension in Mrs. Carey.

"Pam! You can't draw back now," she cried, alarmed, dropping a moistened cover.

"No. I can't draw back now," returned Pamela slowly, feeling, not for the first time, as if she were a

captive in that torture-cell of medieval imagination, whose walls close upon their victim gradually, almost imperceptibly, day by day, hour by hour, until——

And yet, so complex, so infinite in its inconsistencies is the human mind that, even as she visioned the narrowing walls, her ring seemed to catch a gleam of sunlight, and show her a hidden door of escape into a wider world—or was it merely into another form of prison?

That was the thought that fretted Pamela when she had time to think; the uncertainty, the gravity of the step which she was about to take, unillumined as it was by any light other than the clear, pale ray of duty.

At times she almost doubted the existence of even that uncompromising gleam; wondering if she were indeed fulfilling her duty towards herself by making such a marriage.

But between the preparation of her trousseau, and the receiving and returning of calls, she had little time for introspection, tossed as she was from wave to wave of successive excitements.

She alone had qualms. Congratulations continued to shower upon her. Presents came pouring in, often in duplicate, trifles, treasures, personal or otherwise, which would have delighted her heart had she received even a few of them a year or so earlier.

“I don’t want to seem ungrateful, but you can’t appreciate them properly when they come in multitudes like this,” she said ruefully, as she unpacked her third silver hand mirror, and thought how she would have loved it had it arrived when she had tried to start a silver toilet-set on her twenty-first birthday; a set which had never materialised further than the parental comb and brush and the silver-mounted pin cushion which Randall and the girls had given her.

To crown all came a check and a mandate from Great-Aunt Lucilla Carey, an aloof old lady, who lived with a maid and a parrot in a flat near Kensington Gardens, and whose jointure had to be paid out of the dwindling resources of Carrigrennan, no matter what happened.

"If you will come over to me and buy your trousseau in London I shall give you fifty pounds towards it. If not, you must be content with the customary fish-slice," the letter ran.

"I won't go," Pamela declared. "I don't like being bargained with like that. She may keep her old fish-slice, too. I don't want it either!"

"No, you don't. You've got two already," said Kitty sympathetically. "But fifty pounds, Pam!"

"Fifty pounds!" sighed Janet Carey. "I'm sure it's very kind of Aunt Lucilla. You mustn't do anything to offend her, Pam. Your father was called after her, and it was through the death of her two poor boys in the Boer War that Lucius came in for the property. We mustn't forget that, though I must say her jointure is a tax."

Pamela restrained with an effort her impatience at the convolutions of her mother's brain, and said nothing.

"Of course, it will be an awful disappointment my not being able to go up to Dublin and choose your things with you as we had planned," Mrs. Carey went on plaintively. "And I'm sure I don't know what the Disneys, and the Walters, and the Ashtons will say at not seeing your trousseau, Pam."

"That decides me," flashed Pam suddenly. "If the victim is to be decked for the altar, at least, she may have the satisfaction of knowing that her sacrificial robes won't be fingered by the spectators. The thought of Minnie Ashton and Dolly Walters poking about my

things, and wondering why I don't have Valenciennes and Cluny instead of Irish crochet makes me sick."

"Really, Pam, you're very queer!" sighed Mrs. Carey. "To hear you talk anyone would think—"

"They may," retorted Pamela, who certainly seemed to have shed the sheath of her old patient, sunny self to stand revealed in a rather prickly new one. "And I'll be queer! I'll go to Great-Aunt Lucilla and get my frocks and hats in London!"

"Oh, Pam, and we'll never see them!" wailed Kitty. "I was looking forward to trying on all your things!"

"Never mind, Kitten," said Pamela, softening suddenly. "I'll send you patterns and sketches of everything."

But Kitty's cloud was too black to admit of even the tiniest slit of light.

"It's you and Jan are the lucky ones," she said brokenly, tears welling in her eyes, and threatening to roll down her wild-rose cheeks. "She'll be helping you to choose things on her afternoons off from the hospital."

"Of course she will. I never thought of that. Dear old Jan!" Pamela's spirits rose unaccountably.

"Twill mean losing you a long time sooner than we need," objected Kitty.

"Not so long," consoled Pamela. "Sure, it won't take any time to buy a few frocks and hats. Cheer up, Kitten. I'll send you a jumper from London that will take the curl out of Dolly Walters' hair with envy."

"Oh, will you, Pam? You're a darling."

Even as Kitty hugged her gratefully, Pamela knew that, sharp as the pang would be at parting from all that she had known and loved in her short life, there was a certain balm in the thought that this trying period of waiting was not to be unduly prolonged.

Already she was gradually letting Madge slip into her place as elder daughter of the house. She had relinquished her fowls to Babs and Kitty. Imperceptibly she was loosing the innumerable threads which bound her to her home. Although it would always have its inevitable corner in her warm heart, she knew that she was no longer as necessary to Carrigrennan as she had been but one brief month ago.

Already she was preparing to slip her old mooring, and, shooting "long sail lengthening cord," to fare forth into the unknown!

CHAPTER V

PAMELA CROSSES HER RUBICON

"So this is Pamela!" The thin, old voice held appraisal and a hint of disappointment.

"Yes, this is Pam, Aunt Lucilla!" Young Janet Carey, trim and plump in her nurse's uniform, with her mother's eyes and arching brows, took instinctively the part of showman.

Pamela, feeling that she was but a sorry exhibit after a bad sea-crossing and a long train journey, made haste to answer the old lady's tone and eyes rather than her words.

"No, it's not Pamela, Aunt Lucilla," she declared in her soft brogue. "It's a wretched, pea-green, seasick creature who won't have an atom of self-respect until she's had a bath and changed. It's not Pamela at all."

For a moment, the opaque, dark eyes peered at Pamela out of the small, wrinkled face, which looked yellow as old wax beneath the banded absurdity of a smooth black wig. Then old Mrs. Carey's wrinkles relaxed from the severe lines into which her scrutiny had graven them, and her pale lips stretched into a semi-toothless smile.

"In that case run away and make yourself presentable before I introduce you to Boadicea," she commanded.

"Boadicea?" Pamela echoed.

Janet laughed and looked towards the dark corner behind the old lady's chair.

The room was crowded with heavy, old-fashioned fur-

niture. Looped curtains of green rep and cream lace shrouded the windows, through whose half-drawn Venetian blinds filtered a greenish dusk that defied the October sunshine without.

"Boadicea is my parrot," said old Mrs. Carey.

A dry chuckle from the corner betrayed to Pamela's questing eyes the unsuspected presence of a large grey parrot on a black stand. Bird and perch would have completely merged into the obscurity of their background save for a gleam of crimson on the parrot's tail and the winking brilliance of a nickel seed cup on either side of the perch.

"Oh!" exclaimed the girl, turning quickly from the idle intensity of the bird's gaze. "I agree with you, Aunt Lucilla. I'm not fit to face that eye just yet."

A thin chuckle from the old lady echoed the bird's mirthless effort. It seemed to Pamela, with her quick sense of likeness, that an extraordinary resemblance existed between the two beaked faces with their long unwavering gaze from eyes grown old with looking on life.

"Janet will show you where the bathroom is. There is no need to trouble Harriet. She has enough to do, as it is, waiting on Boadicea and me. Mrs. Bent will have luncheon ready by the time you've had your bath. If you were sea-sick you'll need it."

"I will. Thanks very much, Aunt Lucilla."

Pamela followed Janet down the narrow passage with that odd sense of unreality induced by sudden altered and unknown surroundings.

It seemed months already since yesterday. Carrigrennan, with its green and airy spaces, seemed very far away from this cramped and stuffy flat; this crowded seething city.

Janet opened a door into a tiny bathroom.

"I'll turn on your bath while you undress," she said, with all the cheery superiority of the trained nurse. "Your room's next door."

Pamela, weary and travel-stained, looked at her with a questioning wonder. Jan had always been brisk and decided, but now she seemed positively to exude efficiency. What did she think about this forthcoming marriage? They had only talked family gossip since their meeting at Paddington, avoiding the deeper personalities by mutual consent. Pamela felt a waft of loneliness, a swift impelling desire for sympathy. But would Jan give it? Was she not too brisk, too shiningly self-confident to admit any point of view but her own?

Pamela dived into her suit-case for a dressing-gown, and began to undress rapidly. In a moment Janet returned.

"Your bath won't be ready for a few minutes," she announced. "It has an old-fashioned tap which alternately trickles and spurts. Aunt Lucilla won't have a new one put in. She hates innovations, she says."

"Does she?"

"The old one at home was better, even though the water never would get really hot," Janet went on musingly. "Carrigrennan is a dear old place, of course. Heavenly for a holiday, but I'm thankful I've escaped. The life there would kill me now."

Suddenly she faced her sister with an odd look in her eyes.

"So you're escaping, too, Pam, in the good old traditional way,"

"Don't, Jan," said Pam huskily.

She turned a pale, travel-weary face to where a shaft of veiled London sunshine filtered through the window.

"Why are you doing it, then?" asked Janet sharply.

"Because—because—" Pamela, tired and unstrung, gulped hard to keep herself from crying, then blurted out the truth that had never permitted itself to be heard at Carrigrennan. "Well, just because everyone seemed to want it so much."

"Not you, yourself?" Janet's hazel eyes fixed her, round and unwavering, so like, yet so unlike her mother's owl-like stare that Pamela laughed almost hysterically.

"Oh, yes, I suppose I, too—in a way—but not like—oh, don't you understand, Jan?" cried Pamela incoherently.

"I am afraid I don't. Not that sort of weakness," answered Janet uncompromisingly. "Letting oneself be forced into an uncongenial marriage, because other people seemed to want it."

"But it's not! It's not altogether uncongenial. There are lots of things I like about Damer Langrishe—his name, his nose, the shape of his head," said Pamela, snatching with a wild desire for justification at old discarded reasons for her conduct. "Besides, it isn't as if he weren't a relation, as if we didn't know all about him. Oh, Jan!" Hysteria seized her at her own absurdity, her futile inconsistency. "Don't you see how—how awfully funny it all is?" She went into peals of half-sobbing laughter.

"I'm afraid I don't," said Janet stiffly. "Do pull yourself together, Pam. Your bath must be quite ready now. I'll turn it off for you, and then go. I'm on night duty till to-morrow, so must get a little sleep."

Wonder at this announcement steadied Pamela. She checked herself to ask:

"Do you mean you were up all night?"

"Of course."

"What a selfish wretch I am to keep you all this time!" she cried. "It was awfully good of you to meet me, Jan. You must be worn out."

"It would take more than that to wear me out," returned Janet briskly, moving towards the door.

Pamela was aware of a sudden sense of loss at the disappearance of the compact little figure. She felt as if Janet were eluding her mentally as well as physically. With a new waft of home-sickness she longed for some contact, however brief, with the humanity which must be encased somewhere within the trim efficiency of her sister.

"Jan!" she cried at the bathroom door.

Janet raised a slightly flushed face from the taps.

"Well?" she asked uncompromisingly.

"You're not cross with me, Jan, are you?"

The old question of childish days slipped out, evoked unconsciously by the power of association. It was not what she had intended to say at all.

Janet straightened herself.

"Why should I be cross with you? Poor old Pam! You're just as queer as ever!"

But her tone was softer than her words, and she put her arms round her taller sister in a quick little hug that made Pamela want to lay her head on her shoulder and sob out:

"Oh, Jan, isn't it a lonely sort of thing to be going right across the world to marry a man you don't know at all?"

Yet she refrained, checked by the chilly little knowledge that Janet would probably reply sensibly: "You needn't go unless you want to!" unwitting of the subtle invisible pressures which had so swiftly overcome her defences.

With the refreshment of her bath her spirits rose insensibly, and as she dressed in fresh clothing she found herself almost beginning to believe in that queerness of which her mother and Janet so often accused her.

"I must be queer," she thought. "For I didn't like it at home when everyone approved of what I was doing, and I don't like it now when Jan disapproves. I flew out at poor mother and the girls when they made a song about Damer's relationship, and yet I use it now to buttress myself to Jan! How can a person think such different things, and all practically at the same time?"

The puzzle of personality was beginning to display some of its intricacies to Pamela Carey for the first time in her unthinking life.

"Is this Pamela at last?" asked old Mrs. Carey, as she entered the drawing-room later.

"Almost," Pamela admitted with a smile.

"Very good. Boadicea, come and be introduced to your new relative." The old lady stretched out a veiny wrinkled hand, on to which the parrot slowly sidled. "Shake hands with her, Pamela. She won't bite."

"I'm not afraid." Pamela held out a finger which the bird gravely clasped with one cold grey claw.

Mrs. Carey nodded approval. "She wouldn't do that if she didn't like you. Ha! Is that your engagement ring? Show me the sort of diamonds Damer chose for you."

Pamela, flushing, drew off her ring and placed it in a hand almost as clawlike as Boadicea's; a hand on which flashed the sheen of some fine old gems.

"H'm. Not bad. Good stones, if not absolutely perfect. Get him to get you some sapphires later on, Pamela. They'd suit your eyes."

"Oh, I don't think he could afford that," protested the

girl who had always had to look twice at a shilling before she spent it.

"Rubbish! He's got a fine engineering job, hasn't he?"

"I believe so."

"And no one to spend his money on but himself and a chit of a schoolgirl. He must have put by pots."

"Must he?"

"What settlements is he making on you?"

Pamela reddened.

"I don't know. I never asked."

Mrs. Carey looked at her sharply.

"It's a love-match, then, I understand?"

"I'd rather not discuss it, if you don't mind, Aunt Lucilla," Pamela interposed, with flaming cheeks.

"You look quite pretty with a colour," said the old lady irrelevantly. "Something like what I used to be when I was a girl."

In spite of Pamela's self-control, her great-aunt surprised a glance of astonishment at this announcement.

"Oh, you needn't imagine that I always wore a wig and had no teeth," Mrs. Carey continued, shaking her impossibly black bandeaux. "My teeth were whiter than yours, and my hair just as curly. It was only when it all fell out after an illness that I bought my wig. A bald woman is an abomination before the Lord. Bald-headed men are natural enough. False teeth, too, if they want 'em, poor creatures. But not for me. I've only a few of my own left, and 'thank Heaven they meet,' as someone or other says! I don't mind going before my Maker in a wig, but I will not affront Him by appearing in His presence with false teeth. You may laugh if you like, Pamela. I'd rather you did that than choke!"

Old age is a screaming farce when you're young, but a sorry jest when you approach it yourself."

"I don't mean to laugh, Aunt Lucilla."

"Bless you, I don't mind. You're a true Carey, child. You wouldn't wittingly hurt anyone. None of 'em would, bless 'em, though unwittingly they might make enough mischief to set a barrack by the ears! I'm one of 'em myself. Didn't you know that? I married a cousin of my own, Robert Carey."

"Aunt Lucilla, what was it like? Marrying a relation, I mean?" Pamela snatched at the chance of first-hand knowledge of such a vital subject, forgetting that she had already demurred at discussing it. "Was it—very tame—unadventurous?"

Old Mrs. Carey chuckled until she coughed, choked and finally recovered herself.

"The tamest marriage, my dear, is a surprising adventure, a perpetual voyage of discovery. I thought I knew my Robert inside-out, until I married him. On our honeymoon I found that I had wed a stranger. I had to learn him all over again. Unadventurous, indeed! It all depends on yourselves whether it is or not." She chuckled again. "Of course, if you wish to become cabbages it may be tame enough, but you haven't the cabbage look, Pamela."

"Then it doesn't count at all?" said Pamela, a trifle disappointedly, ignoring the negative compliment.

"What doesn't count? Put your points clearly, child, when you ask a question. Don't wobble!"

"Marrying a cousin."

"Of course, it counts, in a way. There's a certain feeling of stability about it, and the satisfaction of having the same set of relations."

"Is that a satisfaction, Aunt Lucilla?"

"Undoubtedly," replied the old lady briskly. "No fear of an unfavorable verdict after inspection. They know the worst of you already. The best is bound to surprise 'em afterwards. But believe you me, my dear, nothing really counts beforehand. You know Damer's a gentleman, of course, and that's a wonderful stand-by, but, mark my words, you never really know a man until you're married to him, no matter if he's your cousin fifty times over! Even if men are all the same, in some ways, they're all different in others. Each one has got his own particular devil tucked away somewhere inside him. Your future happiness will all depend on how deeply Damer's is hidden, or how strongly civilization may have got the upper hand of him." She glanced shrewdly at Pamela's eager, disturbed face. "You're like me. You have plenty of common sense. Look on your man as a big child fastened to a toy rein, Pamela. Keep tight hold on your end of it, but never let him feel the strain."

"Why not?" asked Pamela, in rather a small voice, held back by a sudden reticence from inquiring into the deeper implications of her great-aunt's words.

"Because it will probably make him want to break free. Ah!" The old lady raised her head and sniffed like a questing hound. "I smell Mrs. Bent's cutlets and mushrooms, and hear Harriet coming to tell us that luncheon is ready. Thank Heaven for it! When you come to my age, Pamela, you'll find that the pleasures of the table are about the only ones left to us octogenarians."

The door opened, and a little, old, black-clad woman entered.

"Luncheon is served, ma'am," she said, with an air of silent protest, as she advanced towards her mistress, who waved her aside with a glitter of rings.

"No, Harriet, I'll take Miss Carey's arm to-day," said the old lady, rising with some difficulty.

A surge of mingled feelings swept through Pamela as she bent towards the shrunken figure. Was this the gracious dignity of the evening of life? Did one outlive all the great things, forgetting the love, joy, hope, beauty, grief, the pangs and ecstasies of child-birth, the awful realities of the death of those beloved, for a senile thrill at the prospect of cutlets with mushrooms for luncheon?

Pity, disgust, apprehension, rebellion warred within the girl at the thought. She did not know that hers was the superficial view of youth and ignorance. She was only aware of a swift repulsion; a sick feeling that, if this were to be the end, life indeed was not worth living.

CHAPTER VI

PAMELA PEEPS INTO THE PAST

"I'LL miss her when she goes, Boadicea. She's a sweet child, and a good. She's not as pretty as I was at her age, but she's well-looking enough for a man's second wife. He can't expect beauty twice over, and his first venture faded quickly enough, Heaven knows. A cold piece, eaten up with self-conceit. No humanity about her, no warm blood."

"Aunt Lucilla, don't forget that I'm here!"

At last the murmur penetrated to where Pamela sat in the window.

Mrs. Carey started. She had forgotten the girl's presence, and was not at all pleased at being reminded of the fact.

"I was talking to Boadicea, not you," she returned sharply.

"That's all right then," said Pamela, closing her eyes again. "I only thought—"

"Don't think. It's a most pernicious habit. Half the mischief in the world is done by thinking," snapped Mrs. Carey. Then she suddenly relented. "I may as well talk to you while you are here, Pamela. I'll have enough of Boadicea when you're gone."

"To-morrow," murmured Pamela dreamily.

"To-morrow? So soon? I'd forgotten!"

The note of regret in the quavering old voice pierced Pamela's apathy. She shook off her lethargy with an

effort, and crossing the room drew up a low chair near her great-aunt.

"The time has flown since I came here," she said. "You have been very good to me, Aunt Lucilla."

"I wish I had had you here oftener," returned Mrs. Carey. "Hand me that sandal-wood box off the table, Pam. Your wedding-present is in it."

"Oh, but you've given me my wedding-present already," Pamela demurred, as she placed the box, faintly odorous of the East towards which her face was set, and beautifully inlaid with silver curves and spirals, on the old lady's lap.

"I have not. Did your mother never teach you that it was rude to contradict?"

"Indeed she did, but——"

"I'm glad you're not making a love-match, Pam," said Mrs. Carey unexpectedly, as she turned the tarnished silver key in the sandal-wood box.

Pamela looked up quickly, all the youth, all the imagination in her crying out against this wilful obliteration of romance.

"Why?" she asked, rather breathlessly.

Suddenly a strange thing happened. Fire lit the old, dark, weary eyes; a transient gleam of youth shone from behind the wrinkled mask of four-score years; strength rounded the failing voice.

"Because I've never yet seen a love match that did not bring sorrow with it."

Pamela thrust out hands of protest.

"Oh, no! Oh, no! I'm sure you're wrong."

"I know I'm right."

The brief glow faded, the clear voice thinned to a quaver. Youth was dead; slain long ago by the inex-

orable years, its epitaph engraved in ever-deepening lines by the pitiless hand of Time.

"Even if you are, surely it's better—surely one might risk the sorrow!" cried Pamela incoherently.

"Listen to me!" Mrs. Carey laid a thin hand on the girl's arm and spoke in dry, staccato tones. "I've seen enough of this fever called love to know that it doesn't last."

"In my youth I loved a man with a fire you'll never feel—and you may thank Heaven for it!"

"We were engaged, and he seemed to care as I did. Then he suddenly jilted me for another girl. I nearly died. It wasn't worth it, Pam. He wasn't worth it. No man is. Then I married Robert. Calm after a storm, a sunny harbour and a cargo of quiet toys to bring to port. My two boys made love-matches. Robin's wife ran away with his best friend. Jim—well, Jim's wife died after a year, with her still-born child. The experiment didn't last long enough to count, but she was a poor wisp of a thing. No wife for my splendid boy." Once again old resentments lent a momentary strength to the quavering tones.

"But weren't they happy while it lasted?"

"Oh, happy enough, as far as it went."

"Then——"

"Hsh, Pamela! You know nothing about it."

Pamela thought with an amused resignation:

"Old people may be as rude as they like, but young people mustn't even say 'oh' in the wrong place! But how she must have suffered! Poor Aunt Lucilla!"

"Then there was my own girl's tragedy. We planned happiness for her if we could encompass it at any cost." She paused, then went on. "Lucy ran away with the man we had forbidden her to marry because he was a

confirmed drunkard, and she died broken-hearted, in my arms." She stretched them out with a tragic gesture, then let them fall helplessly in her lap.

"Aunt Lucilla!" Pamela put a warm young hand on the trembling old one in quick sympathy.

Two of the slow difficult tears of old age rolled down the wrinkled cheeks. Mrs. Carey made no effort to wipe them away as she continued her indictment against love.

"Then take poor Damer's first marriage. A love-match, if ever there was one."

Pamela's pulse quickened. Was Aunt Lucilla going to fit some more pieces into the incomplete mosaic of her memory.

The hand on the old lady's began to tremble. She took it away and clasped it tightly with the other to still it.

"He was madly in love with Helena Beaton, a flaxen-fair creature with forget-me-not blue eyes, about as deep as a doll's. Probably his adoration pleased her for a time."

"For a time, yes," nodded Pamela to herself.

"But she cared for only one person in the world, and that was herself. Neither Damer nor her skinny baby when she came meant anything at all to her. She had as much soul as a fish. Damer was different. He had nature in him. He wanted affection. He'll have plenty to give you, Pam, if you take him the right way."

"What is the right way?" asked the girl very low.

"That you'll have to find out for yourself, like every other woman. You'll have the chance of making up to him for the doll's short-comings, Pam. Make a home for him. That's worth doing. Better than if you were handicapped by the restless, selfish, blind, mad craving called love."

Seized by some uncontrollable impulse, Pamela sprang

to her feet, aflame with excitement, moved to trembling, incoherent speech.

"Aunt Lucilla, you haven't proved your case at all! You told me about people who loved and were unhappy afterwards, but that wasn't because they loved. It was because they loved in the wrong way. Their love wasn't the big thing, the true thing that it might have been. You can't prove that their sorrows were caused by love or that they'd have been happier if they had married without it. Jim's was a love-match, and you admit that he was happy until his poor little wife died. My father and mother married for love, and I know that they're happy in spite of all their worries. If there are even those two whom we know of, there must be scores of others whom we don't know of. Take you and Uncle Robert."

"Yes. Take me and Robert," interrupted Mrs. Carey, in a queer reminiscent tone, compact of as many different savours as a jar of pot-pourri.

She veiled her eyes with her semi-transparent lids, even as Boadicea might draw the grey film over her own. Once again Pamela was struck by the odd likeness between bird and woman. Then a flash of intuition pierced her.

"Aunt Lucilla!" she cried passionately. "I believe that in your heart of hearts you'd give all your quiet sunny years with Uncle Robert for one day of that old mad joy!"

"Nonsense, girl!" said Mrs. Carey sharply, opening her eyes and fixing them on Pamela's vivid face. Then she closed them again, and said in a dim, faraway voice: "I believe you're right, Pam, but how in the world did you know?"

For a moment Pamela was conscious of a swift thrill

of triumph. Then her excitement died suddenly as a blown-out flame.

"I don't know," she answered flatly.

What right had she to preach the gospel of love? Was she not, in her own person, about to violate the sanctities which she had professed to reverence? Was she not about to trail in the dust the oriflamme which she had flourished so proudly in Aunt Lucilla's face?

She looked at her great-aunt in rather bewildered apology.

"I didn't mean to be so vehement, Aunt Lucilla," she said. "I don't know what came over me. I'm not given to outbursts like that, you know."

"I know. But it's a relief to speak the plain truth sometimes without any of the trappings of pretence and hypocrisy in which we generally muffle the poor thing. Now we'll be ordinary again." Mrs. Carey opened the sandal-wood box and took out a scarf of beautiful old lace and a little red leather case. Her withered hands shook as she fingered them. "These were my girl's, Pam. I should like you to wear them. I hope you will have more happiness in your married life than she had in hers. Take them away, my love. Don't thank me, or let me see them again. Pearls mean tears, they say. Well, it is better to cry than to have no tears to shed."

She thrust the faintly scented lace and the case of pearls into Pamela's hands.

"Take them away, my child," she said again, in the merest shadow of a voice, leaning against the high back of her chair.

Pamela, stilled and awed at this glimpse into a heart she had deemed dead, slipped out of the room, ashamed of her own shortness of vision, her quick conceited ignorance.

The October dusk dimmed her little room. The great cliff of flats opposite obscured the pale tints of the evening sky. Here and there in the crannied windows, which pierced it like martins' nests, slits and shafts of light gleamed from beneath drawn blinds, while less frequently a glowing orange square betrayed uncurtained casements.

Pamela stood by her own window, pressing the lace with its faintly Eastern scent to her hot cheeks; fingering the cool string of milky pearls in a maze of mingled sensations.

It was strange to think that the great block opposite housed innumerable people, each one with his or her own story, comic, tragic, or commonplace; at the least, a story that mattered most intensely to the maker of it.

As Pamela stood there, crude new thoughts surging in her brain, two figures suddenly silhouetted themselves against one of the orange backgrounds, a man and a woman.

They stood for a space, black and flat as if they had been cut out of paper. Then the outlines turned to profile as the man slipped an arm about the woman and drew her towards him. With a gesture of infinite tenderness the woman put up her hand to the back of his head, and raised her face to his. He bent. Their faces met, merged.

Pamela's pulses pounded.

"In less than a month I shall be alone in a room with Damer, like that. He will have the right to kiss me, like that, if he wants to. Can I go through with it?"

With a jerk she pulled down the blind to shut out the disturbing sight, and stood in the dusk of the room with burning cheeks and leaping heart-beats, seeing formless, distorted visions.

Suddenly she lit the gas to banish them, and looked round the room which had become so familiar to her within the last ten days.

Her larger boxes had already gone. Only her cabin trunk, rug-straps and hand-bag remained. She had almost reached the end of the known which merged into the threshold of the unknown, from which there could be no turning back. For one wild moment she longed to cram a few necessaries into her bag, and take the night train back to Ireland.

She paused on the thought, savouring its possibilities, agreeable and disagreeable, and found that she shrank irrevocably from the idea of facing her own people with the news that she had changed her mind. She could not do it. Such a course assumed the proportions of the impossible. She knew that they loved her, as she loved them, yet instinct warned her that for this one time her return home would be unwelcome. There was no longer any place at Carrigrennan for Pamela Carey. She had stepped out of it voluntarily. Another already had filled it. Such was the immutable law. The result of her first decision had been to set in motion a train of circumstances which must move inevitably on to its appointed end. There was no going back, now or ever. Only as Pamela Langrishe would she be received at Carrigrennan with open arms again.

With a sigh that, understanding, held no reproach, she opened her writing-case and scanned Damer's two letters to draw what courage she might therefrom.

"I remember you a sweet, blue-eyed slip of a thing, as shy and wild as a young colt," the first letter said. That was the one which had come with the ring.

"I have blue eyes still, but I'm not a bit wild now," she had answered.

The last letter, at the end of its instruction for the voyage and its description of the Mrs. Forrester who was to chaperon her, declared: "It will be nice to have a home again. I've had a roof-tree of my own all these years, of course, but it takes a woman to make a home."

Home! Home! The word echoed reassuringly.

"Make a home for him, Pam. That's worth doing," Aunt Lucilla had said.

"Do the duty which lies nearest to thee, which thou knowest to be a duty. Thy second duty will already have become clearer," was the wholesome philosophy upon which Pamela Carey's life had been unconsciously based.

The fog of doubt which had frightened her had lifted a little, the formless phantoms fled. She had given her word to Damer Langrishe. How could she have thought even for a moment, of breaking it? He wanted her to make a home for him. It was up to her to do it. She could, too. She felt that. As for love, she would give him what she could, the best that was in her power to bestow. She could at least show him that all the womanhood of the world was not represented by Helena Beaton. She would, too.

CHAPTER VII

FAREWELL TO ENGLAND

THE tinkle of the dinner-bell put an end to introspection. Pamela hurriedly thrust the letters into the case, and went back to the drawing-room to offer her arm to her great-aunt, who did not like to be kept waiting.

It seemed to her that Mrs. Carey walked a little more slowly, leaned on her a little more heavily than usual this evening. An odd regret pierced her at the thought that she would probably never see her again after the morrow—this eccentric old kinswoman, who had hitherto been only a name to her, and not a very agreeable one at that, but to whom she had grown so strangely endeared during the past ten days. She felt that Aunt Lucilla shared her secret also, though, being so near the end of her days, she would scarcely sigh now for the lost might-have-beens.

Mrs. Bent excelled herself this last evening. Old Harriet had decked the table in bridal white flowers and napery. The gold foil of a champagne bottle glinted from the gloom of the great cavernous side-board which filled half the room. It was Mrs. Carey's personal celebration of Pamela's nuptials.

"Bring two more champagne glasses, Harriet!" she commanded.

When the old woman brought them she turned to Pamela.

"Fill them up yourself, and give one to Harriet and

one to Mrs. Bent. You'd like them to drink to your health, wouldn't you?"

"Indeed, I would," cried Pamela gratefully.

When the girl had returned from her festal errand Mrs. Carey peered across the table at her.

"Why aren't you wearing the pearls I gave you?" she thrust irrelevantly.

"You said I wasn't to let you see them again, dear Aunt Lucilla," answered Pamela gently.

"Did I? I forgot. I'm getting old, Pam. That's what it is." She fell broodingly silent.

"Old cat! Old cat!" shrieked Boadicea suddenly, from behind her mistress's chair. "There's no fool like an old fool! Ha! ha! ha!" The bird broke into a peal of mirthless, eldritch laughter.

Pamela was startled, but Mrs. Carey gave a wide, toothless smile.

"She's quite right. There's no greater folly than inviting skeletons to your feasts. We mustn't be sad tonight, Pam, just as you're on the threshold of a new life. Do you know I'm downright glad you're getting married, child?" the old lady said with sudden animation. "Better any husband than none in these days of emancipated spinsters and sexless women! Woman was created for one job and one only. Built for it, fitted for it, made for it. Let her stick to it. She has no right to be grabbing men's work from them."

"But if there aren't enough men to go round?" put in Pamela with a twinkle.

"Pish! How is it that some women get two?" retorted Mrs. Carey, with the air of one who delivers an unanswerable argument. "However, you've got one all right, so I needn't waste my time over that. What advice did your mother give you before you left home?"

"She said that I was always to remember that Damer was my husband, and not to set myself up against him in any way."

"Anything else?"

"That if our opinions should clash I was to remember that he was so much older than I that he was bound to be right."

"H'm! What did you say to that?"

"I said that as I was so much younger than he, I was sure to be right! Mother laughed, but begged me not to be queer. She said that men liked girls to be as ordinary as possible."

"Be yourself, Pam. That's all that matters. He'll like you well enough. But tell me, is your mother herself the doormat she counsels you to be?"

Pamela smiled. In her soft, apparently yielding way, her mother usually overbore all her father's decisions.

"I thought so!" commented Mrs. Carey. "Lucius is just the sort of man to inspire a woman with the counsels which Janet gave you! Let's go back to the drawing-room. Give me your arm, and when I'm comfortably settled I'll talk sense with you, not the old-fashioned sentimental twaddle you've evidently been stuffed with."

But when the old lady was once more enthroned on her high-backed chair she did not seem inclined for speech, but leaned back with closed eyes.

Pamela sat beside her, and took one hot, dry, old hand in hers, drawing an odd comfort and reassurance from the contact, that to any outside observer, would have seemed to mean so little.

Once or twice the old lady murmured, "Lucy!" while Pamela stroked the hand she held. Silence lapped her round, gradually soothing her fretted nerves.

Suddenly Mrs. Carey sat upright.

"Men like women to be truthful. They expect them to be religious," she announced. "They hate them to be slovenly or cattish. They can't abide a sharp-tongued woman. Never lie to Damer if you can help it, Pamela, and once you're married to him remember that he's your man, and stick to him through thick and thin." Her voice failed suddenly; her eyes veiled themselves again. "I'm a little tired, Lucy. I think I'll go to bed. Ring for Harriet, my dear." She opened her eyes and looked vaguely at the tall young figure bending over her; then, remembering, put up a finger and patted the soft cheek nearest to her. "You must have a good night's rest, too, child. Remember that you're setting out on your voyage of discovery to-morrow."

Pamela's heart leaped.

"Sometimes I wish I could forget it, Aunt Lucilla," she answered slowly.

Yet, deep in some inner core of her, she knew that what she said was only half true.

CHAPTER VIII

A BROWN MAN AND A FAIR WOMAN

A HURRIED good-bye to Great Aunt Lucilla; a mumbled "Heaven bless you, child, and never forget that you're a Carey!" from the old lady; a cross "I'm sure I wish you happiness, miss, but I hope that all this excitement won't upset the mistress!" from the ancient Harriet, out of the depths of her cranky affection for the employer in whose service she had grown old; a warm, "Heaven bless you, miss, and give you great joy of your handsome husband!" from Mrs. Bent.

These varied valedictions followed Pamela to the waiting taxi which was to speed her to the docks in Janet's company.

She cast a hasty glance towards the window where she had seen that disturbing silhouette last night, as she stepped into the cab. It was closed to-day, a thin barrier of gleaming glass between the world and its secrets. She hurriedly took the seat beside her sister and slipped her hand into Janet's in a wordless appeal for sympathy. Janet responded with a squeeze, opened her lips as if to speak, then closed them again.

They were oddly silent during the long drive to the docks, looking with unheeding eyes at the crowds; the throng of traffic, the gradual changes from West End to City, from City to the teeming, sordid streets of the East End.

There was at once so much and so little to say; so

short a time for speech; so many months in which to regret silence, that they had scarcely spoken at all.

At last Janet jerked a remark into the void; a piece of news suddenly remembered.

"I heard last night from Patty Doran, who has just come to Bart's as a probationer, that her brother Tim is going to join your steamer at Marseilles," she announced.

"What luck!" cried Pamela, rousing herself with an effort from the strange sense of unreality which mercifully muffled feeling. "Is he going to India?"

"No. He's only going as far as Egypt, Patty says. He's got a job in the P. W. D. there, in the Irrigation Department, I believe. Still, it will be better than nothing, having someone you've known all your life as far as that with you."

"Indeed it will," said Pamela, with a little lift of relief. "Good old Turkey-egg Tim!"

Tim Doran, whose real name was Stuart (but who answered more readily to anything else) with whom they had played as children, whom they had teased, and chaffed, and nick-named "Turkey-egg" on account of his freckles, and for whose departure they had wept salt tears when his parents had decided to go and live in England! Why, to have his company for even part of the way, would be like taking a breath of home with one on the great adventure!

The pleasure of the thought remained with Pamela throughout the subsequent hours; the arrival at the docks, the novelty of the scene, the vast intricacies of the unknown riverside world, the ships, the people, the porters, the luggage, the swinging cranes, the ordered confusion, the seeming chaos that imperceptibly melted into method.

An uninterested steward piloted them along corridors, through saloons, down a staircase—which he oddly called

a companion—and along another passage, stopping before an alcove in which a large porthole showed two doors facing each other. He indicated the right-hand one.

"That's your cabin, miss," he said, and vanished.

Pamela turned the handle and went in, to start back with a murmured apology.

"I beg your pardon. I didn't know anyone was here," she said, as a well-dressed, middle-aged woman, dark, commanding, hawk-like, raised her head from an open cabin trunk on the floor.

Both berths were piled with garments; the cramped quarters seemed already full to overflowing.

A pair of hard enquiring eyes scanned Pamela's confusion, then lit to a pleased sparkle.

"You must be Miss Carey, I think. I am Mrs. Forrester, responsible for bringing you safely across the world to Mr. Langrishe." She rose and held out a large, capable-looking hand: "I am an old traveller, Miss Carey, and like to get settled before the ship starts."

"That seems a good idea," said Pamela, in the soft voice that was such a contrast to her chaperon's crisp, decisive tones.

She was too unsophisticated to notice that Mrs. Forrester was such an old traveller that she had already appropriated two-thirds of the hooks and most of the available space in the cabin. She had an anxious qualm as to how she would get on with her travelling companion, thrown as they would be for the ensuing weeks into such very close quarters, such an enforced intimacy.

"This is my sister, who has come to see me off," Pamela continued, turning to include Janet in the conversation.

"Ah! How do you do?" said Mrs. Forrester perfunctorily, with a glance at the uniform which stamped

Janet Carey as being entirely negligible as a social entity. "Now if I were you, Miss Carey, I should go up on deck again. It's rather amusing to watch the people coming on and all that, for the first time. I shall have finished here by the time the steamer starts, and then you can come down and get your things out."

There was a dismissal in her tone which Pamela could not combat.

"Perhaps that will be best," she answered, shepherding Janet into the passage again.

Once safely out of earshot Janet turned an indignant face to her sister.

"Cat!" she cried with unusual vehemence. "Did you notice that she'd bagged nearly all the hooks?"

"I didn't."

"I did then. You'll want to be very careful to hold your own with her, Pam. Don't let her overflow."

"What does it matter?" said Pamela, in a rather choky voice.

Once again she wanted to cry, "I'm lonely, Jan!" but once again she refrained. She had burned her boats. If the smoke of the sacrifice made her eyes water no one must see it or imagine that it meant tears.

Yet, at the last, when the unbelievable moment of parting really came, a flood of irresistible emotion blinded the eyes of both sisters; and Janet's rapidly dwindling figure on the quay became an indistinguishable blur long before distance made it so.

Feeling very small and insignificant in this strange new world, Pamela made her way to her cabin as soon as she thought that her eyes would bear inspection, to find, with a sense of relief, that it was empty, as Mrs. Forrester had promised.

As she unpacked she had a little inconsequent thrill of

pleasure in the knowledge that her accessories were just as good as those of her travelling companion, and much fresher. Her grateful heart wafted new thanksgivings toward the thoughtful family, for having had their striped silver brushes and toilet-boxes engraved only with "P," thus enabling her to use them without incurring the ill luck consequent on those who assume their matrimonial initials before they are legally entitled to do so.

With a little flutter of trepidation she removed some of Mrs. Forrester's garments from the pegs on which they had encroached and placed her own thereon; earning thereby, if she had but known it, an unwilling share of that lady's respect. She made a careful division of the available space, allotting a little more than her rightful share to Mrs. Forrester, as became her superior status as chaperon; feeling, as she did so, that all this could not be really happening; that it must be a dream from which she would presently awaken to find herself in her old surroundings at Carrigrennan again.

* * * * *

For the next few days the known receded to an even greater distance, for Pamela lay in that daze of semi-consciousness which is the sea's one boon to her temporary victims.

Then one morning the ship's motion seemed to have abated; through the open porthole she could see a glitter of dancing sunlight. A stir of life quickened within her, but not so far as to induce instant action. She was still content to lie in her berth, conscious of that curious sense of detachment from the familiar, the stable, which most people experience on their first sea voyage.

A brisk stewardess bustled in with a tray. She reminded the girl a little of Janet.

"I'm sure you could eat something this morning," she

said. "The sea is like a mill-pond. Even my worst patient is sitting up and taking notice."

Pamela smiled.

"Aren't I the worst, then?"

"Not by long odds." She shook up Pamela's pillow, and slipped a pale blue quilted silk jacket round her shoulders. "Eat up every morsel of this, and get up when you've finished. You'll be much better on deck."

Her words were tonic as well as prophetic. An hour later, a pale and shaky Pamela crawled on deck to the blue freshness of day, looking for her chaperon, of whom she had seen but little during her days of incarceration.

Her head still swam and her gait was rather uncertain. It was a relief to see Mrs. Forrester's hard, handsome profile, and to hear her perfunctory :

"Ah, Miss Carey, feeling better at last? I'm glad to see you about again."

"I'm quite all right now, thanks," said Pamela weakly, lurching into an empty deck-chair.

"Good. I rescued these chairs for us both. Have you brought up any work or anything to read?"

"No, I haven't. I just want to rest and look at the sea."

"Ah, you'll feel more lively presently," returned Mrs. Forrester, glancing at the girl with a touch of that contemptuous superiority which all good sailors feel for bad ones, and wondering what Damer Langrishe had seen in this pale wisp of a creature without a decent feature but her eyes. "Of course, seasickness is very devastating," she reminded herself. "And it's always difficult to see another woman from a man's point of view. She doesn't look as if she had money, somehow. Has she birth?"

She questioned the innocent Pamela until she discovered

that as far as family went, Damer Langrishe's fiancée was "all right," as she phrased it. Then, having satisfied her curiosity, she relapsed into silence, working furiously at the lemon-silk jumper which she was knitting for herself.

* * * * *

Pamela was content to lie there, watching the coastline of Portugal which peaked jaggedly against a clear sky; noting the clustered brown villages here and there, the white tilt of an occasional sail against a silver-blue sea. She felt as one sometimes feels after a fever, as if she had completely shed her old self with her old life, and she awaited with the resignation of fatality whatever the future had in store.

"If only Damer could have come home!" she thought half-wistfully, half bitterly. "If only one hadn't to jump into it all at once like this! To have no preliminaries!"

What she secretly resented was the fact that she had been cheated of the spring-time of her wooing, that time when every woman is for once a queen, even if she has to abdicate immediately afterwards.

If only she could have had the kindly counsel, the tender wisdom of some older and more experienced woman at this period, it would have been both help and solace to Pamela Carey, but she had to keep her vague resentments, her formless apprehensions to herself. Between her and Mrs. Forrester was a great gulf fixed, of temperament, outlook and character.

They had no mutual meeting ground. Mrs. Forrester was of the world, worldly: Pamela, warm of impulse, unsuspecting and curiously unsophisticated for her twenty-eight years. Their companionship, forced as it was by circumstance, was purely superficial, and the girl

had the uneasy feeling that her chaperon would be as glad as she was when the voyage's end brought a parting of their ways.

Still, Pamela enjoyed her journey, and the days slipped quickly by, each fraught with interest or incident which had all the charm of novelty. Gibraltar, with its tiers of brightly-tinted houses, reminded her a little of Queenstown; but there was nothing Irish about the voluble, dark-eyed vendors of fruit in green rush baskets or sprays of scarlet-tongued poinsettias. She seemed to have a foretaste of the East as she watched the swarthy lascars bargaining for oranges with the fruitsellers, whose gaily coloured boats clustered round the ship's side like wasps round a pear.

But it was not until they steamed into port at Marseilles that Pamela quickened to anything like her former vivacity.

It was a blue day, on which the sun struck sparkles from every little wave, and smote the golden cross on the dome of the cathedral to a glittering prominence; a day which touched clustered roofs and spires to beauty and made a glamorous vista of the semi-circle of the bay, curving to a sweep of red-tiled villas and a welcome blur of green.

It was not alone the thrill of her first glimpse of France that excited Pamela; she felt stirred at the thought of seeing so soon someone as firmly entwined into the very fabric of her youth as was Tim Doran.

Having told Mrs. Forrester she was expecting an old friend to join the *Syria* at Marseilles, she and her chaperon leaned over the ship's side, watching the people from the boat-train running the gauntlet of the shrill-tongued sellers of lace, toy-balloons, deck-chairs, and fruit before they embarked.

Suddenly out of the stream of the unknown two figures emerged; a large, fair woman, wrapped in a dark blue cape, who walked with curious floating gait, and a tall, thin, brown young man, whose nondescript, freckled face was redeemed from ugliness by a pair of very eloquent grey eyes. He carried a dark-blue leather dressing-bag which obviously belonged to the floating lady.

Mrs. Forrester gave an amused laugh.

"Why, there's Heloise Waring!" she exclaimed: "And she's annexed a young man as usual!"

"It's Tim Doran," cried Pamela, a thrill in her voice at sight of her old playmate.

Mrs. Forrester cast a quick sidelong glance at her charge. The girl was transformed. Her eyes had the sea-sparkles in their blue depths; her face was vivid with a sudden radiance.

"Poor Langrishe!" she thought, a cynical smile twisting her thin lips. "I hope devoutly that I shan't have one of these transplanted romances on my hands! I wonder if I can trust Heloise to keep him out of mischief? She's not one to relinquish a man if once she's got her claw on him!" she mused, as she went forward to the gangway, hands outstretched, to greet her friend. "My dear Heloise, what a delightful surprise. I had no idea you were coming out to India this winter."

"I'm afraid I'm not going as far as India this winter, Maud," answered a caressing voice, so deliberately soothing in inflection that it, paradoxically, rasped Pamela when she heard it. "My foolish old Julius cannot bear the thought of my being so far from him as India, so I am only going to Egypt this time. I must follow the sun, you see."

"Couldn't you persuade the professor to come with you?"

"Dearest Maud! His research work! How could you imagine that a mere woman's need could rival that?" Mrs. Waring shook a blue-veiled head. "But where is Mr. Doran? He very kindly carried my bag for me."

She looked round vaguely, fair, large and helpless, with that appeal which wins instant response from the opposite sex.

"He is greeting his friend—my charge, Miss Carey," answered Mrs. Forrester, glancing to where Pamela stood, her hands clasped in Doran's, her face alight with eager interest.

Mrs. Waring followed her gaze.

"Your charge?" she echoed with raised eyebrows.

"Yes. Pamela Carey. One of the Careys of Carrigrennan in Ireland. I'm taking her out to be married to Damer Langrishe. You remember him, don't you?"

For an instant, a queer change passed over the calm fairness of Heloise Waring's face. It was as if some giant hand had suddenly wiped out its softness, its sweetness, leaving only a pale, hard mask. The impression was fleeting, no sooner registered than gone. Mrs. Forrester thought that she must have imagined it, as she heard the honey-sweet tones murmur: "Dear Damer Langrishe! Of course, I remember him. Why, his wife, Helena Beaton, and I were at school together. I was one of her little bridesmaids. Dear, faithful man, I never thought he would marry again. You must introduce the girl who has persuaded him to change his mind."

"There wasn't much persuasion about it as far as I can gather," whispered Mrs. Forrester. "There's some mystery about the affair. She admits that she hasn't seen him for ten years. But I'll tell you more later on."

"Do, my dear. But we mustn't be uncharitable, must

we? Introduce the girl to me before I go below. I've rather a——”

“I only hope I'll be able to hand her over safely to the right man at Bombay,” sighed Mrs. Forrester, with a dark glance at the two unconscious figures who had drawn apart from the other groups.

Mrs. Waring tucked away a straying golden tendril before she answered with a rather self-conscious smile:

“I don't think you need be afraid, Maud. Mr. Doran—you see, I happen to know of a rather naughty little episode. Well, boys will be boys, but still—he's only going as far as Port Said, as it happens. He will scarcely have time to fall in love with—no, I really don't think you need be uneasy.”

“She'll have plenty of time to fall in love with him, if she hasn't done so already.”

“Oh, that! She must take care of herself,” answered Mrs. Waring with a tinkling laugh, which sounded incongruous with her rather generous proportions. “Damer Langrishe can't expect you to——”

Heloise Waring's ellipses always made Mrs. Forrester want to shake her, but she was too much interested now in her implications to resent them unduly.

She piloted her up the deck.

“Miss Carey, Mrs. Waring wants to know you. She is an old friend of your future husband's.”

Pamela turned, her face still aglow. The radiance faded a little as Mrs. Waring pressed her warm brown hand in her two cool, large, white ones, and murmured words of congratulation, which did not ring quite true to the girl's excited fancy.

“You have drawn a prize in the matrimonial lottery, dear Miss Carey,” she cooed. “Damer Langrishe is one in

a thousand, but I needn't tell you that, surely, you who——” she paused, smiling suggestively.

“No,” answered Pamela, with a proud little lift of her head. “I know what Damer is, thank you.”

This woman's unnecessary championship of her future husband was like a nettle-sting. Yet oddly enough it seemed to forge another link between her and Damer, drawing them closer together. Her misgivings were for herself alone. No one else should know that she had any.

“You've known him for a long time, then?”

“Yes. We've known him always. He is a—a distant cousin of my father.” Her lips twitched, the relationship again. “He—they used to stay with us in Ireland.”

“Ah, then you know my poor Helena, too?”

“*Your* poor Helena?” queried Pamela, stung to echoing Mrs. Waring's delicate impertinences. “Was Cousin Helena a relation of yours then?”

“Not a relation, but a dear friend. We were at the same school, though, of course, she was a good deal older than I. I was one of her little bridesmaids.”

“How interesting!” said Pamela politely.

“Don't you think that this—this epithalamium is a little one-sided?” thrust in Tim Doran, with his pleasant drawl. “I'm sure Langrishe is all that you say, but I think he's the one to be most congratulated. You see, I've known Pamela since she was in her cradle——”

“Ah, nonsense, Timsy! Sure you know that I'm three years older than you are!” laughed Pamela.

“You don't look it, my dear child,” said Doran firmly. It was quite true. The fires of youth had been newly lit within Pamela. Life and Time had changed Tim Doran from the boy she had last seen into the man who now stood before her, thinning a contour here and there,

hardening the line of cheek and chin, putting an incongruous sadness behind the merry twinkle of the grey eyes.

"What have you done with my bag, Mr. Doran?" asked Heloise Waring plaintively.

"Here it is safe and sound," answered Doran, stepping towards her with it.

In the instant during which they stood side by side confronting Pamela, the girl had a queer little flash of memory.

The big, old kitchen at Carrigrennan, with its huge corn-bins near the door, and its half-cured hams hanging from the rafters. The long wooden table, littered with the servants' tea. Pamela herself coming in from the yard to find old Mary Clancy telling fortunes by tea-leaves—"Shake a cup, Miss Pam, and I'll tell yours!" It had all the reality of a cinema picture. What was it that old Mary had said? "*There's a brown man and a fair woman comin' into yer life, Miss Pam—and not all for good, nayther. You'll want to be mindin' yerself wid them asthore!*"

Pamela had laughed. The brown man would be Damer, of course, tanned by Indian suns, the fair woman, Dido. She could not possibly expect everything in her new life to go smoothly, where two such unknown elements were concerned. She would have to walk warily at first, naturally, have "to be mindin'," herself, as old Mary said. Then new interests sponged the old woman's prophecy from her mind.

It came back to her now with a swift sense of warning as before her stood a brown man and a fair woman in curious juxtaposition.

These two had come into her life truly, but only for a

very brief interlude. They would go out of it again a week later at Port Said.

It was absurd that she should feel even this momentary twinge of uneasiness.

CHAPTER IX

ANOTHER SILHOUETTE

ON the night before the *Syria* was due to reach Egypt there was a dance in the first saloon.

Pamela threw herself into it with all the zest of one who loves dancing, and who has never had enough of it.

Tim Doran was her principal partner. As he had taught her what she knew of the latest dances, she essayed them only with him, smilingly refusing the other men who wanted to dance with her, on the score of possible clumsiness.

But there was no clumsiness about the light figure in Doran's arms, as Pamela danced on, unconscious of the fact that her behaviour was causing tongues to wag. She clung to Tim's companionship as the last link in her old life so soon to be irrevocably severed. She had no idea of the tittering hail of comment to which her frank annexation of him had given rise.

She only knew that she felt a lump in her throat at the thought of their parting, as they paced the moonlit deck after a long, intricate two-step.

The place seemed deserted. As they moved towards the ship's side neither noticed that two deck chairs in the shadow of the awning were occupied, nor did they hear the whispered criticism as they passed.

"Look! Again, dear! It's the talk of the ship," murmured Mrs. Waring. "Oh, these quiet girls——"

"Quiet? She was quiet only till young Doran appeared

on the scene," answered Mrs. Forrester. "Thank Heaven, he gets off at Port Said to-morrow. The other men won't be bothered with her then, and I shall have a chance of getting her safely to Bombay. What they see in her I don't know. Why she hasn't even a feature!" Her hand went up instinctively to her own well-cut, aquiline nose.

"There is a something," admitted Mrs. Waring generously. "A shade, a nuance, a little difference! I think she has a slight cast in one eye. That always attracts men, you know. I tried to save that poor young Doran, but he seems positively infatuated—for the moment, at least. That's his type. He's just over one little episode, and is ripe for another. He'll be after someone else the instant he lands in Egypt. Young men, you know," she sighed tolerantly.

"You promised to tell me something about him," Mrs. Forrester reminded her.

"Did I? Ah, yes, dear, I remember. But you mustn't repeat it. It's all rather vague, and I am the last woman in the world to wish to make mischief, you know."

"Yes, yes! But what was it? Tell me. I am quite safe!"

"It's only that when a friend who was seeing me off at Victoria caught sight of young Doran on the platform, she seemed very interested, and said that she had seen him in Cornwall in the summer, staying at an inn in a little fishing village, with a very attractive girl!"

"His sister, probably."

"No, the landlady said not. They weren't married either. They were the only people in the inn and had been there a week, she said."

"Alone together?"

"Alone together. A clandestine affair. Cecily gathered

that." Mrs. Waring lowered her voice further, hesitated, then spoke as if reluctantly. "This morning I questioned the Carey girl, and she admitted that she had been to Cornwall last summer!"

"Heloise! You don't mean to insinuate——"

For once Mrs. Forrester permitted herself a pregnant ellipsis.

Mrs. Waring laid a white hand on her arm.

"Dearest Maud, I insinuate nothing. I merely asked a question for the gratification of my own idle curiosity. It is an odd coincidence, you must admit."

"I don't believe that Pamela Carey was ever the heroine of such an episode," said Mrs. Forrester bluntly.

Mrs. Waring shrugged shoulders which gleamed marble-white in the moonlight.

"I don't mean to hint for an instant that she was—she grew rather red and confused over the Cornwall question, though, and changed the subject as quickly as possible."

"Why didn't they marry each other if that was the case?"

"No money, probably. Besides, you know what girls are nowadays. Lax to the last degree."

"Nothing is proved, Heloise," said Mrs. Forrester quickly. "I shouldn't mention it to anyone else if I were you. I can't imagine the girl doing a thing like that. Her affair with young Doran is so very open now."

"I'm afraid that's the worst feature," sighed Mrs. Waring. "I pity poor Damer Langrishe."

"Damer Langrishe is quite well able to take care of himself," returned Mrs. Forrester shortly, feeling thoroughly disturbed by Mrs. Waring's insinuations.

"You are always so charitable, dear Maud. I try to be, too, but the evidence of one's own senses—just look over there!"

Mrs. Forrester looked, and saw a most compromising silhouette. Against the pale, moonlit background of sky and sea two faces met and kissed.

Smitten with a sense of vicarious responsibility, she rose from her chair and crossed the intervening strip of deck.

"Miss Carey, I think it is time you went below," she said hardly. "You have been up here just a little too long."

Pamela looked at her, startled, but not altogether guiltily, she was forced to admit.

"Very well, Mrs. Forrester," the girl answered quietly. "I was just saying good-bye to Tim here. There will be such a crowd to-morrow."

"That's all very well as long as it is good-bye!" Mrs. Forrester said significantly. "As for you, Mr. Doran all I can say is that you seem to forget that Miss Carey is the promised wife of another man."

Tim Doran made a step forward, holding himself in with obvious difficulty. "I do not, Mrs. Forrester," he replied huskily. "If Langrishe himself were here I believe Pam would have kissed me good-bye just the same."

"Indeed I would. Thank you, Timsy," Pamela cried gratefully.

She turned away and went down to her cabin with burning cheeks and wrathful eyes. She was not going to justify herself to Mrs. Forrester if she dared to think ill of her. She had kissed Tim Doran as she might have kissed Randall. In the long-ago days he and her brother had been inseparable. He was like one of themselves. No one but this hard, unsympathetic woman would have thought anything of their innocent farewell.

"Evil minds, that's what they have!" she told herself hotly, as she lay in the darkness reconstructing the

conversation which had led up to the incriminating episode.

The shadow of parting had lain upon both, softening each to the brink of confidence.

Tim Doran's young heart was sore. He was smarting with a sense of loss, and wrong, and wounded pride. The latter fought against revealing his hurt in spite of the balm which he knew that Pamela's solace would bring.

Her eyes had been quick to note the change in him, but what he withheld, her own reticence forbade her to seek. Pamela's delicate reserve, carefully hidden beneath her outer frankness, prevented her from trespassing on the secret place of others. But to-night, the moonlight, the mystery of their illusive isolation in a world of silver-spun sea and sky, the shadow of their approaching parting opened the portals of Pamela's speech.

"What's worrying you, Timsy?" she asked softly.

"How did you know?" he said with relieved surprise.

"I knew from the first moment I saw you at Marseilles.
'Tisn't a girl is it?"

"It is," he confessed.

Quick fear seized Pamela.

"Oh, Tim dear, it isn't Mrs. Waring?"

He gave a queer, excited laugh.

"You wouldn't call her a girl, would you?"

It would have added another mark to the score already mounting against her if Heloise Waring could have heard Pamela's heartfelt: "I'm glad."

For a moment silence held. Then Pamela said tentatively:

"Tell me, Timsy."

"There's nothing to tell," he answered slowly. "I made a fool of myself for the umpteenth time in my life. That's all."

"She treated you badly then, my poor boy?"

Pamela's warm indignation distilled quick sympathy.

"It was my own fault. I thought she cared as I did, but she didn't. The mischief of it was that she—was only playing. I wasn't. And that's that!" The boy put out an impulsive hand, and took Pamela's in his. "You're a brick, Pam. I'm an ass at saying things, but you've been simply topping. It's bucked me up no end having you on board. Langrishe is the luckiest chap in the world, I think. I only hope he's half good enough for you."

"Oh, Tim," murmured Pamela, proud, sad, glad, ashamed, all at once.

"You'll play the game with him, Pam, whatever happens?" the hoarse young voice went on. "It gives a fellow a bit of a jar, you know—" He stopped abruptly, loyalty sealing his lips.

"Oh, my poor Timsy! Dear old boy!" Pamela murmured, stung with anger towards this unknown girl, who had taken her playfellow's heart in her careless little hands and tossed it aside as worthless.

It was then that, tenderness and pity welling irresistibly within her, she had put up her face and kissed Tim Doran as a sister might.

"God bless you, Pam!" he murmured, just as Mrs. Forrester made the dramatic interruption, which had jarred so painfully on them both, hurling them from the heights of innocent emotion on which they stood, to the hard ground of a resented misunderstanding.

It was hours before Pamela fell asleep; hot restless hours in which the throbbing of the ship's machinery seemed to be beating in her heart and brain.

Her pale cheeks and heavy eyes next day were naturally attributed to her grief at parting from the man to whom she was not engaged.

Pamela nerved herself to one frank talk with Mrs. Forrester before the *Syria* reached Bombay.

On the subsidence of her first anger, she felt that some explanation was due to herself and Doran as well as her chaperon; but the difficulty was to find an opportunity. Mrs. Forrester kept so strictly to the levels of the commonplace, so rigorously relegated their intercourse to the exchange of trivialities that Pamela was baulked of every opening.

At last, one hot evening in the Red Sea, as they sat side by side languidly knitting, Pamela, despairing of better opportunity, thrust suddenly.

"Mrs. Forrester," she said, sitting up and leaning forward with burning cheeks.

"Yes?" Mrs. Forrester glanced at the girl, noting her obvious embarrassment. "What is it, Miss Carey?"

In spite of what she herself knew and what Heloise Waring had insinuated, she could not help liking Pamela a little. Apart from her affair with Tim Doran, she had given her no trouble, and had proved herself a pleasant and considerate companion. As an old traveller, Mrs. Forrester knew how to appreciate that fact. She disposed herself with interest now to hear what the girl had to say. She looked as if she hovered on the brink of confession, but Mrs. Forrester had no intention of helping her out. She was not in the least desirous of being burdened with troublesome confidences.

"I don't want to have any misunderstanding about Tim Doran and me," Pamela blurted out.

"No?" Brows and lips made amused query.

Pamela, pricked to swift wrath at her attitude, stumbled on, fiery-eyed.

"I see now that—that our friendship may have been capable of—of misinterpretation." Heavens! what a

word! she flashed to herself. "It all seemed so natural to me that I never thought, never dreamed that anyone could think twice about it. I've known Tim always. We played together as children. He was like one of ourselves. I kissed him that night as if he were my own——" She choked over the memory of Randall, and fell silent until her lips had ceased to tremble. Then she went on in clearer tones, her head proudly lifted. "It never occurred to me for an instant that anyone who knew me, who knew Tim, could imagine that we could wrong Damer in any way. But, of course, that was where I made a mistake. I forgot that you didn't know us, that you were all strangers."

Her tone seemed to put Mrs. Forrester at an immense distance, and gave her a momentary unpleasant sense of insignificance.

"It was Mrs. Waring who made the most of it," Pamela went on. "I have a feeling that it was she who put nasty ideas about us into your head. Now, wasn't it?"

Mrs. Forrester saw a loophole, and to her own surprise availed herself of it.

"Heloise Waring rather loves mothering young men," she returned evasively. "I fancy that she was a little disappointed that Mr. Doran evidently preferred being sistered to being mothered!"

"Oh, that was it?" said Pamela, with a slight sense of relief. "It was jealous she was then? She ought to be ashamed of herself, and she with a husband of her own!" Her brogue deepened in indignation.

Mrs. Forrester gave an amused smile.

"You put things rather crudely, my dear girl," she said, with a sudden desire to ask a point-blank question of her charge, which at the same time Pamela's frankness seemed to render unworthy as well as unnecessary. "I

quite understand the position between you and Mr. Doran, but candidly I can't help saying that you have been just a little indiscreet. If you had divided your attentions more carefully——”

“But I really couldn't be bothered with any of the other men?” exclaimed Pamela, with wide eyes. “I only wanted to talk to Tim!”

“How embarrassing innocence can be!” murmured Mrs. Forrester to herself. “Poor Langrishe will have his hands full. Thank Heaven that I can almost see the blur of Bombay on the horizon!” Aloud she continued: “If I were you, Miss Carey, I shouldn't go out of my way to antagonise married women. They have an immense amount of power in their hands, as you will find when you get to India.”

Pamela looked at her, startled.

“But I don't want to. I didn't mean—oh, dear, how different everything is. If—if you are anywhere near me in India, Mrs. Forrester, I shall be very grateful for your advice.”

“I don't suppose I shall be,” answered Mrs. Forrester, “as my husband expects to get a hill station quite soon. But if you walk warily, and are not too impulsive, you will get on all right. Besides, your husband will be able to show you the ropes.”

“Your husband!”

The words sent a little thrill through Pamela, and sent her back into her chair dreaming. It was coming very near now.

Already Mrs. Forrester's attitude had subtly altered. She spoke almost as if Pamela were “one of them” already; a member of the noble army of married women instead of being a mere, inconsiderable spinster.

She would have a place of her own in the world, a

definite position. The reproach of spinsterhood—still in Ireland an undeniable stigma—would be removed from her once and for all. She would never be “poor old Miss Carey!”

Alternately she longed for the days to lengthen and to shorten; to put an end to her suspense and to prolong it; to reveal Damer Langrishe’s personality and to cloak it indefinitely.

Most of all, she absurdly wanted to go to sleep, and to wake up one morning to find herself definitely married, with all the apprehensive preliminaries safely over.

CHAPTER X

JOURNEY'S END

PAMELA's heart almost stopped beating as the big, white-clad figure in the unfamiliar topee advanced inevitably along the deck towards her; then it pounded so violently that the sound of it in her ears drowned all other noises.

She closed her eyes in a moment of uncontrollable agitation, opening them instantly to find that her fate was upon her.

To Damer Langrishe's questing gaze, the girl standing with tightly clasped hands next to Mrs. Forrester looked extraordinary young, shy, and frightened; still the wild slip of a thing of ten years ago. Great eyes opening suddenly in the white little face, showed him that her eyes were as sapphire-blue as ever.

In that moment something tugged at Langrishe's heart-strings. A loneliness about Pamela's slim figure made instant appeal, awakening him to the swift sense of magnitude of the demands he had made upon her in asking her to come all this way across the world to marry him, a comparative stranger.

Even as the revelation flashed upon him, he stepped forward, and took her trembling hands in a warm, comforting grip.

"Why, Pam, you're not frightened of me, are you?" he asked in a curiously reassuring tone. "My dear, plucky little girl, to come out to me like this!"

The familiar surged back upon Pamela at the sound of his voice, the sight of his suddenly remembered face. She

looked up into the clear eyes beneath their bushy brows, with an almost odd sense of having come home again.

"Why, you've got dad's tangled eyebrows!" she cried irrelevantly. "I had forgotten."

Unexpected tears welled beneath her lids and trickled down her cheeks. Langrishe, thinking with a flicker of humour, that surely never before had bride greeted her bridegroom in quite the same words, took out a big, silk handkerchief, and gathering her into his arms, quietly wiped them away.

Pamela leaned her head against him for a moment with a sense of relief and content. The despised consolation surged back to her mind in an instant of surprised realisation.

"It *is* a comfort to have him a relation, after all!" she thought, remembering Aunt Lucilla's words about the feeling of stability with such a preliminary connection induced.

"I don't know what you must think of me, greeting you like this," she ventured, shyly, looking up at him from under her long lashes.

"I'll tell you what I think of you presently," Langrishe answered, still keeping one hand in his most comforting way. "Meanwhile I want to thank Mrs. Forrester for having brought you safely out to me. Where is she?"

He turned to where Mrs. Forrester had tactfully withdrawn.

"Here I am, Mr. Langrishe. I needn't ask how you are," she said, speaking with a cordiality quite new to Pamela. "You see I have successfully fulfilled my mission."

Langrishe wrung her hand.

"Thank you a thousand times. I'll never forget it."

"You don't ask me how she behaved on the voyage

out?" continued Mrs. Forrester, with deliberate lightness.

Pamela, flushing, thought:

"She needn't have said that!" then reflected: "Perhaps she wishes to show me that she believes what I told her about Timsy."

"You're coming to see the last of your charge, aren't you?" Langrishe said, turning to Mrs. Forrester, "we're to be married in the Cathedral at half-past twelve. Denton, of the Woods and Forests—you know him, I think—is to be my best man. I thought, if it would suit you, that we could drive straight to my hotel where I have taken rooms for a few days."

"I shall be charmed," answered Mrs. Forrester. "My train doesn't leave till four."

"I've ordered luncheon and the special brand of pom-mery that you like. If you're both ready we may as well go. I've made arrangements about your luggage, if you'll just give me your keys. I told Forrester that I would look after you."

"Excellent man!" smiled Mrs. Forrester, while Pamela felt as if she had been taken charge of by a beneficent genie who did things in the proper magical manner without fuss or effort.

The next two hours whirled past her excited senses with phantasmagoric brilliance.

The thronged quays with their rainbow-coloured crowds, the dazzling sunshine, the unfamiliar palms, streets, houses, people, all seemed part of the magic.

A moment of stilled realisation came to her when Langrishe took her to the door of the suite he had engaged, and left her there alone with Mrs. Forrester.

"I must say I like going about with your man, Pamela," said Mrs. Forrester, using the girl's christian name for the

first time. "He does everything so well. One never even hears the chink of money. The art of paying unobtrusively is one of the tests of the right sort of man."

A knock at the door revealed a salaaming servant on the threshold, with a bouquet of flowers in either hand; one rose-pink and one white.

"For the mem-sahib. For the miss-sahib."

Her wedding bouquet!

Pamela took the stiff white cluster and turned towards the window with misty eyes, touched at this unexpected evidence of Damer's thought. Then she noticed that a little white-ribboned parcel was attached to the flower-stems.

She opened it with trembling fingers and took out a small, white velvet case. A sapphire pendant set in diamonds hung from a slender platinum chain wound round its satin mound.

She held it out to Mrs. Forrester with a sudden longing for sympathy!

"Look! Look what Damer has sent me!" she cried, with lips that quivered in spite of herself.

Mrs. Forrester stooped to pick up a slip of paper which had fallen to the ground.

Pamela took it and read,—"*With my love to my bride.
To match her blue eyes—DAMER.*"

She flushed and trembled suddenly, sinking on to the nearest chair, longing, with a swift intensity, for even one of her own people.

Oh, if only her mother were here! If only she could lay her head on that comfortable shoulder for five minutes she felt that she could get up and dress for her bridal with a new heart. Half her fears and tremors had left her at sight of Damer. She knew that she would be at least safe with him whatever happened. But oh, how

she wanted someone from home just to put their arms around her, and pet her a little, and laugh at her, and tell her not to be so silly, and what a dear Damer was, and how unexpectedly nice and thoughtful—remembering her eyes, and the bouquet, and everything!

Instead, she had Mrs. Forrester, cool and appraising, looking at her lovely pendant as if she were merely wondering how much it had cost.

"This is a star sapphire," she said, rather grudgingly. "Quite a good stone, too. Really, Pamela, you are very lucky."

"I am indeed," answered Pamela, stifling a homesick sigh.

But she knew she was lucky in having found someone as strong and as gentle as Damer to look after her, while Mrs. Forrester obviously weighed her good fortune by its monetary value.

The Carey pride came to the girl's aide. She stood up, and, unfastening the frock she wore let it slip to the ground and stepped out of it.

"I shall have the proper luck of the bride after all," she said with an effort at gaiety.

"What do you mean?"

"Don't you know that every bride should wear:

'Something old and something new,
Something borrowed, and something blue?'

I'll have Damer's pendant for the blue, and mother's silk stockings—which I've promised faithfully to send back again—for the something old and borrowed. She says you can't buy such stockings nowadays," said Pamela, putting them on as she spoke, and slipping her well-shaped foot into white suède shoes with silver buckles. "How do you like my wedding-dress, Mrs. Forrester?"

"Very much," her chaperon answered, looking at the

unmistakably good cut of the simple little white silk-jersey frock, which suited the girl's lines and gave an effect of grace and dignity to her slenderness.

She had just pinned on her hat, with its brim of soft curled ostrich-feather tips, when another knock came at the door.

Mrs. Forrester opened it to find Langrishe, now attired as the orthodox bridegroom, outside.

"We're just ready," she said smiling, turning back into the room to call Pamela. "I've got a very charming bride for you."

"I know you have," he returned gravely. "Will you ask Pam to come into the sitting-room next door for a moment before she goes downstairs? You'll find Denton in the lounge. I'll bring her along in a minute."

"Certainly." Mrs. Forrester glanced at him, pricked by a vicarious envy of her charge.

"I'm ready now, Damer," said Pamela's voice behind her. She was too shy to ask him how he liked her in her bridal-dress, though she wanted badly to know.

Mrs. Forrester, after a cursory glance round the room to see that nothing was forgotten, picked up her bouquet and preceded them along the corridor.

Langrishe drew Pamela through the half-open door of the sitting-room, and closed it behind them.

"Pam!" he said, holding out his hands.

She looked at him half-shyly, wholly sweet.

"Yes, Damer?" Her heart-beats quickened.

"I didn't realise till I saw you all I'd asked of you," he said huskily. "You trust me, don't you?"

"I do," Pamela breathed.

"Before Heaven I'll be good to you little girl. You believe that, don't you?"

"I do indeed. And you'll try to—to care a little, won't you Damer?"

"It shouldn't be hard to care for a sweet thing like you," he said rather unsteadily. "Don't you know that you've found the way to my heart already? Where am I as regards yours? Anywhere near it at all?" The clear eyes softened beneath the tangled brows.

"Quite near. Very near," the girl answered tremulously.

"You darling! Pam, will you kiss me?"

Cousinship receded, vanished. Here was a man seeking his mate. Pamela had a vision of the silhouette in the Kensington flat as Damer bent his head, his lips seeking hers.

For a moment she had a wild desire for flight. She wasn't ready. Oh, she wasn't ready!

Then, with a surrender to the inevitable, came her first thrill of passion as Damer, his lips on hers, caught and held her to him closely.

A moment later, a little pale, a little breathless, she hurried beside him along the corridor to the waiting lift which delivered them, still rather silent, to the expectant best man and Mrs. Forrester.

The Cathedral stretched emptily about the little party as they came up the aisle, unheralded by music, unwatched, unexpected, save by the cleric who performed the marriage ceremony with all the perfunctoriness born of the long habitude.

Out of the haze which enwrapped Pamela, two things stood golden-clear; Damer's handclasp when he put the wedding-ring on her finger, Damer's voice as he said: "Till death us do part."

She made her own vows whole-heartedly, awed by a

sense of the mystery, the immensity of the issues of that "honourable estate" into which they had plunged so unthinkingly; but for the rest she was back in her earlier dream again. Nothing seemed real, except the looming presence of Damer himself.

The wedding luncheon, so carefully ordered by the bridegroom, was appreciated at its full value by only two of the party. Pamela felt far too excited to eat, and though Damer satisfied his hunger, he could not afterwards have told how. The orthodox requirements were fulfilled. The orthodox health drunk.

"I am going to look after Mrs. Forrester," announced Mr. Denton later. He was a lean taciturn man of whom Pamela felt secretly rather afraid. "We shall be travelling together as far as Allahabad, where Colonel Forrester will meet her."

"I think we ought to start soon," said Mrs. Forrester. "No, Mr. Langrishe, you mustn't come to see us off. Mr. Denton and I are quite able to look after ourselves. You ought to drive Pamela out to Malabar Hill. She would like to see some green after all our days at sea."

They rose, each secretly relieved at the thought of a return to the normal after the tension of the last few hours.

Mrs. Forrester, warmed by Langrishe's patient gratitude and consideration of her tastes, drew Pamela aside before they parted for a final word of warning.

"You are a married woman now, my dear," she said.

"One of us!" Pamela murmured to herself with a twinkle.

"And I beg of you to remember that where men are concerned aggressive innocence is often more misleading than actual guilt."

"Thanks, Mrs. Forrester, I'll try not to forget,"

Pamela answered. "Though I really don't see—"

"Remember the Doran episode," warned Mrs. Forrester. "Well, the best of luck to you, dear, and a tranquil married life."

"Oh, I don't want to be too tranquil," declared Pamela foolhardily. "I'd rather have a sparkling stream than a stagnant pool any day."

Mrs. Forrester smiled and shook her head in a superior fashion.

"Wonderful effect the wedding-ring has on some girls," she thought to herself, as she drove away, leaving the newly married couple together.

When the carriage had disappeared Pamela and Langrishe turned back to the hotel, each aware of that slight sense of flatness which invariably follows the effervescence of any unusual excitement; each conscious of their mutual responsibilities, their mutual ignorances of each other.

"What would you like to do now, Pam?" Langrishe asked tentatively.

"What do you suggest?" Pamela countered his question with another, feeling that it was more his place than hers to devise entertainment for their wedding day.

"I thought that perhaps we might sit on the balcony of our sitting-room and have tea there. Then drive out to Malabar Hill, as Mrs. Forrester suggested, when it is cooler."

"That sounds delightful."

Pamela cast a quick thought to the publicity of the balcony. There could not be any—any demonstration there. Not that Damer's nearness jarred on her. His touch held no repulsion. She was glad of his presence, but she just wanted to—get used to him, before—before—

It was the attitude of the nymph looking over a white shoulder at her pursuer, half fearing, half longing for the capture which her virginal instinct prompts her to evade.

Damer slipped a protective arm about her as they entered their sitting-room.

"Is there anything you want, little girl? Tell me if there is." He bent to put his cheek against hers. It felt hard, and faintly rough; essentially masculine.

A new sense of power stirred in Pamela. She looked up at him provocatively.

"Only one thing that I can think of at the moment," she said smiling.

"What's that?"

"You promise to let me do it?"

"I promise."

She slipped away from his hold and ran into her bedroom, coming back instantly with a little ivory comb in her hand.

"What is that for, Pam?"

"To comb your eyebrows! You said you'd let me do it. I've wanted to ever since I first saw you this morning!"

Langrishe's laughter rang through the room.

"You funny kid!" he cried. "Here, do your worst. Now be serious for a moment."

"I thought you said that we were going out on the balcony." Over her shoulder the flying nymph peeped at him.

"So we are, but not until I have kissed my wife."

"Damer!" Her pulses fluttered.

He held her at arm's length, and bent a curious look upon her.

"You don't dislike it, do you?"

"No—no, but——"

"I don't want you to kiss me if you'd rather not." His voice sounded hard.

"Oh I don't mind," Pamela faltered.

"I want more than that," said Langrishe masterfully.

"What do you want, Damar?"

"I want my wife to kiss me."

For an instant the light stern eyes gazed into her dark blue ones as if they would perceive her very soul. Then they softened to tenderness as he whispered:

"Won't you, Pam?"

"I will," breathed Pam, lifting her face to his with a thrill of expectancy.

Before he released her she murmured:

"I'm not a child, really, Damer. I'm twenty-eight, a woman. I want to be your woman, to make a real home for you——"

"Which I've never had," he said quietly. "Dear little girl, you can't set about making a home for me just yet."

"Why not?" A sudden apprehension seized her, she did not know why.

"Because we're on the wing again almost immediately."

"What do you mean, Damer?"

"I mean that you'll see more of the world than you imagined when you set out, Pam, for I've got my marching orders for Egypt." For the moment the bridegroom was merged into the man with whom work came first.

"Egypt?" echoed Pamela, feeling a cold touch at her heart.

"Yes," answered Langrishe exultantly. "It's rather a big thing for me. I'm to be engineer in charge of the new Barrage at El-Armut, for which Sir John Crooke has got the contract. Don't unpack anything more than you need, for I've taken our passages to Port Said in the next boat."

CHAPTER XI

AN UNLESSON'D GIRL

LANGRISHE noticed a slight dimming of Pamela's brightness as they went out on to the balcony together, but he attributed it to fatigue after the excitements of the day rather than to perturbation at the news he had just told her. He himself felt a genuine pleasure in the idea. Always a rover, the East held unfailing appeal, and Egypt, that land of ancient mysteries and warring modernities, drew him even now with her lure. It would be a big thing for him; perhaps the biggest he had yet tackled.

In the zest of the thought his tentative wooing of his young wife was half-forgotten; yet, instinctively he turned to her now, avid for the sympathy which her broken sentences had proffered.

In spite of her disclaimer, she still seemed a child to him. He still saw the eighteen-year-old Pamela in her straight white frock. He had not yet found the woman who had peeped at him for a moment out of the depth of her eyes; the woman who wanted to be mate, wife, comrade, rather than plaything.

"You'll like going to Egypt, won't you, Pam?" he said eagerly.

Pamela's instinct was not to disappoint him, but in spite of her desire truth almost forced itself out. It was with great difficulty that she turned a blunt "no" into a tentative:

"You like the idea yourself?"

"I'm frightfully bucked about it," he returned boyishly. "You see, it means quite a big thing for me—the biggest that has fallen to my lot so far. There's a house on the river bank ready for us, and a staff of servants——"

"How is that, Damer?"

"A turn of the wheel of life. Poor Bond, who had the job, died suddenly the other day, and Crook wired to me to know if I'd take it on."

Pamela paled and drew back in her long cane chair.

"Dead men's shoes!" she murmured.

Langrishe looked curiously at her.

"You're not superstitious, surely," he said. "Why, that's the way promotion goes. I'm awfully sorry for poor Bond, of course, but it would do no one any good if I refused to step into his place just because the poor chap had the misfortune to die suddenly."

"Of course not. I don't mean to be silly, only——"

"Only what, you blue-eyed thing?"

Langrishe smiled at her, then went on irrelevantly:

"It's like a real bite of the old country to see you sitting there, ashore, with the same shy little ways and soft brogue as you had ten years ago."

"I couldn't put on an English accent if I tried," said Pamela, relieved that he had not pressed the Egyptian question further.

"I don't want you to try," Langrishe declared. "I like it much better as it is. Tell me, did Dido write to you at all?"

Pamela answered eagerly, anxious to evade questions about Egypt. She did not want to confess that she was superstitious, that she always bowed three times to the new moon and to a single magpie; that nothing in the world would induce her to walk under a ladder, sit down

thirteen at a table, pin new work with a black pin, or put her left arm into a sleeve before the right!

Even as she chatted to Langrishe another portion of her brain seemed to be working like a kaleidoscope, flashing, as it turned, vivid, disconnected bits of memory.

Her relief at Mrs. Waring's departure at Port Said, the slow, unreadable smile on the fair face as it looked back at her from the gangway's foot, her unreasonable joy at the thought that she would probably never see her again, a joy which took away half the pang at parting with her old playmate.

"A fair woman and"—what was it old Mary Clancy had said?—*"a brown man."* They had come into her life at a critical period, not as she had fondly thought, to go out of it again immediately, but to remain. There they were in Egypt, that land of the inscrutable Sphinx, awaiting her coming with the calm expectance of fatality. Some queer foreknowledge told her that. . . . There was no escape for them: the fair woman and the brown man. . . .

The strange conjunction spun through her thoughts, narrowing in circles to the point of utterance, gradually forcing itself towards the outlet of speech.

Pamela fought against it no longer. Perhaps if she spoke of it she would free her mind of the obsession. She plunged.

"I met a friend of yours on the steamer coming out, a Mrs. Waring, who is going to winter in Egypt."

Langrishe looked his pleased surprise. "Heloise Waring! What a bit of luck!"

"Luck!" echoed Pamela, with a curious intonation.

"Yes. She's a delightful woman, isn't she?"

"Is she?" said Pamela dubiously. "To tell you the truth, I don't think she liked me, Damer. She evi-

dently didn't consider me half good enough for you."

"Oh, nonsense!" returned Langrishe smiling. "You must have imagined that, Pam. She was one of Helena's bridesmaids. She spent a couple of cold weathers with us after Dido was born."

"Did she?"

"Yes. She really is a charming woman," continued Langrishe reminiscently. "Do you mind if I smoke, Pam?"

"Not a bit." Pamela watched her husband with interest as he took out a cigar, prepared, and lit it.

The scent of the tobacco thrilled her. It seemed one with this strange new element which had been so suddenly thrust into her life, the essentially masculine element, hitherto lacking.

After a moment she spoke again.

"Was she—Mrs. Waring, I mean—very young at the time of your—your wedding?"

"About Helena's age, I think. Why?"

"Oh, no particular why," returned Pamela airily.

If Heloise Waring were a friend of Damer's she could not very well tell him that she was a liar. For the first time she realized that one's friend and the friend of one's friend may belong to two very different types. It seemed to her as if she had already turned over a whole page in the Book of Life on this, her wedding day.

"If she's wintering in Egypt we must have her to stay at El-Armut," Langrishe went on in a tone of pleased anticipation.

"Must we? Not just at first, though." A very real apprehension rang in Pamela's tones, which Langrishe, manlike, misunderstood.

"You want us to be by ourselves?"

Pamela nodded. He had voiced three-fourths of the

truth; the remaining fourth, to which she could not give utterance, being that she shrunk with her whole heart from the idea of having Heloise Waring as her guest. Having a very strong sense of hospitality herself, she felt instinctively that Mrs. Waring might not be true to her bread and salt. This, too, she could not say to Damer. Instinct warned her, not reason, and the same sixth sense told her that the human male will back reason against instinct any day, having a wholesome distrust of feminine intuitions.

"We've got to learn each other before we can be at home to visitors? Is that the idea, Pam?"

"Yes," said Pamela quickly. "Do you--do you know much about girls, Damer?"

"Precious little," Langrishe confessed, taking out his cigar and looking at her with a disarming frankness. "That was why I asked you to come and teach me. I've never had much to do with women, Pam. They're a sealed book to me. I want you to unseal it. Will you?"

"I will. But you mustn't judge all women by me, Damer, or by any one woman. We're all different. I know I'm full of faults. Mother and the girls often tell me that I'm queer, so I suppose I must be."

"I like your kind of queerness, then."

"Do you?" Pam looked at him gratefully. "Ah, but you don't know me yet, Damer. There's one thing I want you to promise me, though, and that is, that if you should notice any little things about me which annoy you, irritate you, you'll tell me about them yourself, instead of letting them go on annoying you. It won't hurt my feelings in the least. I'd hate to think that you were suffering a silent martyrdom on account of any little peculiarities of mine, which I might easily conquer if I only knew about them."

Langrishe laughed outright, then sobered. Here were truth, sincerity and the sense of duty which he had pre-visioned. More, much more than he had had any right to expect, and still—— He was conscious of a troubling of his senses, a swift, compelling desire for more than the sweet reasonableness which Pamela seemed so eager to proffer.

He unconsciously squared his shoulders. If he wanted more than that he must win it for himself. It was not for him or any other man to have all the gifts of the gods tossed into his lap at once.

He held out his hand. "That's a bargain, then; though, mind you, I'm much more disposed to 'Be to her virtues very kind. And to her faults a little blind!'"

"That's very nice of you," smiled Pamela, slipping her hand into his.

"It must be mutual, though," Langrishe went on, putting his other hand over hers in so warm a clasp that the girl had the odd sensation that it was her heart he held fluttering there.

"I'm a clumsy chap, I know, and you'll want to have great patience with me. You'll teach me your finer woman's ways, and if I'm a bit slow to learn——"

"If we're both slow to learn we'll blame our teachers, and not our own stupidity!" cried Pamela, with sparkling eyes.

"So long as there's truth between us," went on Langrishe slowly. "Truth between you and me——"

"There will be, Damer, I promise you that." Pamela, moved by a swift impulse, bent and laid the softness of her cheek on the big brown hands, in her first spontaneous caress.

Langrishe was stirred to a tenderness that gripped him by the throat and made speech difficult. Already she had

shown him a goal worth striving for. Already she had opened the sealed book and given him his first glimpse of a real woman's heart.

* * * * *

During the voyage back to Egypt the mutual lessons continued, to the pleasure and profit of each.

Pamela, plunged into so many strangenesses at once, adapted herself to her new life with a rapidity which surprised even herself. The conditions of the unexpected return voyage amused and delighted her with their contrast to her former one.

Then she had been nobody in particular; just a girl going out to India to be married, a more or less irksome charge to her chaperon, a person of no real importance.

Now she was a married woman, with a distinct status of her own. She had a husband whose delight was to make her way smooth and beset it with little pleasantnesses: a man of her own, whose obvious pleasure and pride in her made all her little tentative graces and whimsicalities unfold and blossom as a flower before the sun.

Damer liked her queerness, which he called originality. He laughed often at her, even when she saw no cause for laughter, but his amusement held no sting. Day by day they grew closer together on their strange honeymoon. Day by day Pamela felt an increased reluctance at the thought of its inevitable end. This was but a breathing space between an epoch and an epoch. She knew that, and cherished it all the more dearly for its evanescence.

At last they came to the Suez Canal, and Pamela had once again the odd sensation of seeing ships apparently steaming over vast tracts of sand. The faint, inexplicable premonition which her first sight of Egypt had aroused in her, and against which she had fought as being utterly

unreasonable, returned to her in full force, as they steamed past the harbour of Ismailia, fringed with its feathery palms, dark-plumed against a rosy sunset sky, and caught a vignette of shimmering waters reflecting cream, flat-topped houses.

And yet, Egypt appealed to her, too. She knew, in a sense, what Damer felt, as he leaned beside her on the ship's rail and said rather low: "I believe that the East will tug at my heart to my dying day."

"Will it, Damer?"

"Doesn't it call you at all, Pam?"

"It does and it doesn't. Don't laugh at me, my dear, when I tell you that I feel just a little bit afraid of it."

"I shan't laugh at you, my child, because I think I can imagine what you feel. Egypt is a woman, and it takes a woman to fear a woman. A man doesn't fear her. He wants to conquer her. She's all at once veiled and brazen, bold and subtle, shameless and mysterious, a thing of paradox." He took off his topee and wiped his forehead. "Perhaps I'm talking nonsense, but that's how I feel."

"Oh, no, you're not. I understand."

Pamela shivered a little . . . "It takes a woman to fear a woman." Did she fear a woman now? She scarcely knew.

"You're cold. I'll go below for your coat. The temperature drops quickly when the sun goes down. You mustn't get a chill."

He was back in a moment with a pale blue blanket coat, which he wrapped round her. Her eyes were misty as she turned to thank him.

"Damer, you don't know what it means to be taken care of like this."

"You don't know what it means to have you to take

care of," he returned with a gruffness that only half hid the tenderness.

All the fineness in the man, long hidden, was surging upwards to the light, bringing with it daily revelations of all that he had hitherto missed, all that had passed him unheeded.

"I feel as if I had suddenly been transplanted into another world," the soft voice went on. "Separated from everything I've known all my life. I haven't even had letters from home since we touched at Port Said coming out. They followed me to India. They'll have to follow me back again." Her tone was wistful.

"What a lot I have to make up to you for! Shall I ever do it, I wonder?"

"Oh, you will. You do," Pamela cried. "But sometimes I just long to hear from home, what they're doing and how everything is getting on without me."

"Very badly, I'm afraid."

"Very well, I'm sure." Pamela smiled up at the square, sunburnt face, with its thatch of faded red hair, and wondered how anyone could ever have called it ugly. To her it had grown wonderfully dear. She loved its blunt outline. She wanted to put up her hand and stroke the back of the well-built head, whose shape she had always admired.

Langrishe tucked her hand within his arm.

"Let's go for a walk," he said, turning to pace the deck.

Night swooped upon the desert with all the incredible swiftness of the East. Along the canal bank a camel with a white-cloaked rider moved with the silence of a shadow. Squares of orange light glowed from low houses on either side. Overhead the sky curved like a dome, sapphire-deep, set with large, trembling stars.

As they paced the deck, arm-in-arm, Pamela suddenly

remembered that other night on which she had stood beneath an Eastern sky, hand-in-hand with a man. Her cheek burned at the recollection of Mrs. Forrester's look, her stinging words. Out of the wisdom of her newly-found womanhood she knew how little the episode had meant, how innocent of all offence her action had been. For a moment she wondered if she ought to tell her husband about it. Then an inflection in his voice put all other thoughts to flight.

"You'll soon be able to make a home for me now, Pam," he was saying in the tone which he kept for her alone. "It will be rather nice, you know, to see that turned-up nose of yours opposite me at the breakfast table every morning! I don't think I'll let Dido come out to us until after Christmas."

"For fear she would interrupt your view of my nose?" asked Pam saucily.

"Yes," he answered, in a tone of deep content.

"Do you know Dido at all?"

"'Pon my word, I don't believe I do. She was a precocious kid at thirteen, when I last saw her, with a funny, peaked little face, big dark eyes, and a mop of fair hair. She had apparently read all the latest novels and was up-to-date in her conversation. I got the impression that her grandparents, old General and Mrs. Beaton, spoil her terribly in the holidays."

"Why did you never send her to us, Damer? We'd have loved to have her."

"I don't know. It never occurred to me."

"And yet it occurred to you to ask me to marry you! How was that? I've often wondered," said Pamela curiously.

She glanced up at the big figure looming beside her in the starlight, and rubbed her cheek against his shoulder.

"Tell me, now," she murmured coaxingly.

"It was an inspiration sent straight from Heaven," Langrishe assured her.

"Ah, but, really—"

"Ah, but, really!" he echoed mockingly. "I was very near to not sending the letter at all, not realising its celestial origin. Twice I tried to tear it up—but I didn't."

"Ah, you didn't!" breathed Pamela on a sigh of relief.

"Are you glad or sorry?"

"Which do you think?"

For answer he pressed the arm in his closer to his side. This sense of wordless understanding was growing between them day by day.

Pamela gave a happy little laugh. "I believe that Dido was the *Dea ex Machina*, all the same."

"I believe she was," Langrishe admitted, with a smile. "Yet, I'll bet my last penny that it's the first time she has ever appeared in such heavenly guise!" His laugh rang out.

"You're not flattering to your only daughter."

"My only daughter!" Langrishe's voice struck a note of pride. "She's all right. A handful, if you like, but straight and clean and true, like all the Langrishe women. '*Vis virtute nascitur!*' You remember our motto, Pam? It's yours now, you know."

"Yes, it's mine now," echoed Pamela dreamily. "But—suppose she disappoints you? Suppose you expect too much of her?"

"I couldn't expect too much of my women," answered Langrishe inflexibly. "Neither my big girl nor my little one will ever disappoint me!"

"Oh, don't say that, Damer! It's like tempting Fate!" cried Pamela hastily.

"You're not going to disappoint me already by being superstitious, are you?"

"I—I'm afraid I am rather superstitious," Pamela admitted. "There's a banshee in the Carey family, you know!"

"Nonsense, darling! There are no such things as banshees." Langrishe stopped in the deserted corner of the deck and turned his wife's face up to his. "Now, look me in the eyes and say: 'I don't believe in banshees, Damer.' "

Pamela looked at him obediently, a smile lurking round the corners of her mouth.

"I don't believe in banshees, Damer—but I do implicitly, all the same!"

Langrishe stooped and kissed the mouth that mocked him. What did it matter, after all, what she believed in, so long as she believed in him?

The more he thought of it the more the idea of postponing Dido's coming appealed to him.

CHAPTER XII

THE THRESHOLD OF EGYPT

THE bright huddle of houses, topped by greenish domes, resolved itself into Port Said.

The steamer slowed majestically to her stopping-place opposite an arched and pillared building, whose three turquoise-tiled domes were surmounted by the sign of the crescent. Ashore, blue-robed Arabs, grinning negroes and donkey boys ran along the water front, shouting, calling, laughing, in a shrill babble of sound.

The ship was boarded by a hoard of white-robed, gesticulating Arabs, who fought among themselves for the luggage of the unresisting passengers.

As Langrishe and Pamela stood watching, a little, dark man in pale grey tweed and cream velours hat pierced the clamouring throng with an air of importance in inverse ratio of his proportions.

Pausing tentatively near Langrishe, he reminded Pamela irresistibly of a fussy little tug approaching a great liner.

"You Mr. Langrishe?" he inquired. "Ah, I thought so. I'm Bullen, Sir John Crooke's agent here. He asked me to look after you." The velours hat came off with a flourish. "Drop that!" Mr. Bullen cried in Arabic to a one-eyed man who had just succeeded in wresting Pamela's dressing-bag from her. "My own men are here. They'll take your luggage to my boat. I'll see your heavy baggage through the customs, if you'll give me your keys. Ah, thank you. I have an arabiye on shore

for you, and have reserved a first-class compartment in the train."

He hustled them to the ship's side and down the gangway into a smart little motor launch.

"I'm not used to being shepherded like this," Langrishe murmured as he handed Pamela to the stern of the launch.

"No, it's you who do the shepherding," she whispered back.

Mr. Bullen, whose manners did not permit of an instant's silence, chattered all the way to the shore, principally shop to Langrishe, for which Pamela was thankful. She wanted to look at the varied scene before her, gay as the opening of a musical comedy, she thought.

There was even more colour here than in Bombay. Men and boys in bright-hued robes—blue, yellow, dull pink, bearing on their heads baskets of oranges, dates, rings of bread, or platters of fish; black-veiled women, women veiled in white; little children in garb of every tint. Clamour, movement, the incessant jostle of East by West. It was all new as an unread book to Pamela, who had not had time to land at the port on her outward journey.

The queer, booth-like shops, the donkeys a-jingle with chains and gay with scarlet trappings and red-humped native saddles, the Arab policemen, still in their summer white, the noisy little trams with their human freight of every colour, from darkest brown to pasty white, held her amused interest.

When the train steamed out of the crowded station to Mr. Bullen's valedictory:

"If you care to stay the night in Cairo I'll wire Marshall not to expect you till to-morrow," she turned to Langrishe with a sigh.

"Damer, it's like being plunged straight into the Arabian Nights!"

"I thought you'd like it," he said triumphantly, thinking what funny, fanciful creatures women were; swayed by every passing whimsy.

"Oh, I always *liked* it, only—" Pamela felt she could not possibly put her paradoxical feelings into words. "Will we stay the night in Cairo, do you think?"

"We shall," he corrected. Then he looked across at her with a twinkle. "Now, the only flaw I have found in you so far, Pam, is your absolute grammatical confusion between 'will' and 'shall.' "

"It's not grammatical, it's racial," Pamela retorted. "If that's all the fault you have to find with me, you can buy me an English grammar in Cairo, and I'll spend my spare time in trying to master it. And now that we're being candid, I've wanted to tell you for a long time that I don't at all like the way you poke out your under-lip when you're thinking. It makes you look like—" Pamela's fatal facility for simile almost betrayed her into saying,—"like a codfish trying to be serious"—before she changed it into a more tactful "like anyone but my own nice husband."

Langrishe smiled. "Makes you feel as if you'd married a stranger, eh, Pam?"

"Well, so I did," said Pamela heedlessly.

"Come now, sweetheart!" he expostulated, a trifle hurt.

His marriage, had, so far, been so extraordinarily successful that Langrishe had forgotten his own earlier misgivings. He held out his hand.

"*Not* a stranger, Pam?"

"No; only my father's second cousin once removed!" she retorted, smiling. Then, noting that for once her

jesting was distasteful to him, she crossed over to his side of the compartment and put her cheek against his. "My own dear man," she said softly. "No stranger now."

He drew her down into his arms and kissed her passionately, holding her closer.

"You little witch? What have you done to me?"

"What have I done to you, Damer?"

"Stolen my senses, I think. Have I got all of you, Pam, every bit of you? Tell me."

His passion, his insistence shook her a little.

"Very nearly," she whispered tremulously.

"But not all? I want all." His words were hot. They seared some inner reserve.

"Not all—yet," she murmured unsteadily.

He released her suddenly. "Of course not. How could I? It's absurd. A man almost old enough to be your father!" he jerked out.

Pamela managed a shy laugh. "I never heard of anyone being a father at fourteen." Her voice softened to appeal. "Give me time, my dear one. It's all been so wonderful. You shall have everything I have to give, only be patient with me, Damer. It's all so new, you see. . . . I'm only learning. . . . Give me time."

"You shall have all the time there is," answered Lan-grishe, half ashamed of his outburst. "Look, Pam! Did you expect to see water-lilies in Egypt?"

Pamela looked from the window to where a stretch of water gleamed in the sunlight, bearing a flotilla of golden-hearted white blossoms on its surface, in strange contrast to the wastes of sand beyond.

She felt a little flat at Damer's sudden change to quietude. Men were like that, she supposed, swinging you up to the stars one moment and planting you stolidly on the ground the next. But he was a dear, all the same,

and she did love him. She did! She did! After all, he was all she had now in this unfamiliar new life which they were facing together. Forsaking all others, she had chosen to cleave only to him. She was quite ready to give him all she had if only he would have patience, remembering the strangeness of everything to her. But that was manlike, too. He didn't, couldn't understand the plunge it had been for her. What more did he want that she hadn't given him, that she wasn't prepared to give him?

Aunt Lucilla's words flashed back:

"A big child on a toy rein. Never let him feel it strain."

She smiled. After all, they had not been three weeks married yet. They had come wonderfully close in so short a time. Only a month ago! Oh! she was indeed blest, indeed fortunate. The door had not been closed on romance, after all. She had married a man who was in love with her now, whatever he might have been beforehand. A man who wanted her, all of her: body, soul and spirit. She thrilled at the thought, stealing a glance at the square-cut figure, looking so steadily at the passing desert, with its clusters of palm-girt, flat-topped, mud villages; brows drawn, lower lip pursed out in thought.

Body and spirit she had already given him, graciously, generously, but her soul was her own, must be her own as yet. She had not reached that wonderful fusing, that transcendent oneness which is love's last and greatest gift.

Washed clean of self with tears, thrice purified as by fire must be those who kneel to receive love's ultimate Holy Grail.

Some dim realisation of this came to Pamela as the train sped through the wastes of sand stretching to a far horizon in faintest tones of biscuit pink and lavender, the desert dwarfing to insignificance this puny toy of mere

man's making, that puffed its fussy way across the vastness, spending its little waft of smoky breath in an instant's defiance of its illimitable leagues of crystal air.

They touched the commonplace again when tea in the restaurant car was announced by an Arab attendant, with a flashing smile.

Langrishe took hold of Pamela's elbow as he piloted her along the swaying train.

"If only the girls could see us now," she said. "Oh, Damer, you'd love them, especially Kitty. She's so pretty and such a little darling. Why, she's your own sister now. Your own little sister!" She smiled at the thought. She had not been able to adjust herself to altered relationships as yet, life whirled her on so fast. Each day brought a train of new impressions, crowding out the old. She would not have time to settle down to collect her thoughts until they arrived at El-Armut.

When at last they reached Cairo and descended to the platform, thronged with the usual crowd of third-class passengers in their draperies of blue, black, and white, surmounted by the inevitable crimson fez or turbûsh, Pamela felt a new and delightful sense of security.

At home, on her infrequent journeys, she would have had to see about her own luggage, her own cab, her own hotel, if ever she committed the extravagance of going to such a place. Here she had to think of nothing, bother about nothing. She had not even seen her ticket on the journey from Port Said.

"Any man is better than no man," Aunt Lucilla had declared.

Pamela would not go so far as that, but she felt the swift, surging pride of the woman in her mate when she realised anew Damer's quiet efficiency.

"We're going to Shepheard's," he announced. "It's

Cosmopolitan, and will amuse you. Our heavy things are going straight out to El-Armut. You've got evening kit in your cabin trunk, haven't you?"

"I have," Pamela answered. "Two frocks." She felt thankful that she had spent Aunt Lucilla's fifty pounds on a few good things, not frittered it on fripperies, as Kitty had suggested.

The drive through the crowded streets passed all too quickly. Pamela wanted to stop half a dozen times to feast her unaccustomed eyes upon some strange vignette, a white-bearded, yellow-robed old man gravely driving two turkeys with a little switch, through the crowd of carriages, motors, camels, donkeys and pedestrians; a chocolate-coloured, turbanned face, suddenly peering through a green-shuttered window in a cream wall; a harém carriage rolling by, revealing a flash of dark eyes between two wisps of snowy veil; a blue-robed figure praying beneath a palm tree, oblivious of all else save his devotions; a lemonade seller in scarlet and white, chinking his brass cups together as he sauntered along with his gleaming vessels; a string of camels laden with great bundles of vivid green clover.

"I knew you'd like it," said Langrishe, watching her changing expression. "I don't know how I am ever to tear you away from the fascinations of Shepheard's."

The arabiyah, a low victoria drawn by two skinny, long-tailed, black horses, and driven by an Arab in frock coat and tarbush, drew up with a flourish before the famous hostelry. The wide terrace, looking upon the brilliant kaleidoscope of the street, was thronged with visitors.

Pamela, conscious of the journey's dishevelment, thought she had never seen so many idle people gathered together before.

A snake-charmer plied his trade to a knot of curious spectators, who looked at his wriggling reptiles with mingled feelings. Sellers of bead chains of various weird hues paraded their wares beneath the balustrade. As she hurried up the broad, low steps in Langrishe's wake, she felt very countrified, very insignificant, an impression which was not modified when a tall, fair woman, beautifully dressed in palest grey, floated across the terrace towards them, and held out her hand in pleased surprise.

"Damer Langrishe, of all people! How delightful to see you! . . . and Miss Carey!" Heloise Waring turned to Pamela, as an afterthought.

"Mrs. Langrishe, please!" Damer reminded her, taking her hand in a warm grip.

"Ah, forgive me! I had forgotten that all-important marriage ceremony." Mrs. Waring smiled. "Sometimes, I daresay, you forget it, too, Miss—I mean Mrs. Langrishe."

Pamela looked at her, swiftly aware that absence had taken no edge from the keenness of her dislike; nay, rather sharpened it than otherwise.

"No, I don't think I ever forget it," she answered quietly, stung by something in the other woman's tone.

A prickle of malice seemed to underlie its smoothness. Her remark, innocent enough on the surface, seemed to bear some hidden meaning—an enigma to which Pamela had not the key.

"How delightful to find you here!" Langrishe was saying. "Quite a piece of luck for us, as my wife and I are only staying in Cairo for the night on our way up to El-Armut."

"What are you going there for?" queried the honey-sweet tones.

Langrishe told her, to an accompaniment of little nods and deep-drawn breaths of interest.

"Then I may see you on my way to Upper Egypt. I am going to Luxor later on."

"You may take us in on your way," said Damer hospitably. "Mustn't she, Pam? We were talking of it the other day, weren't we?"

He turned to Pamela for confirmation of his invitation. It was the first direct appeal he had ever made to her. She felt, for an unreasonably chilled moment, as if he could not have asked anything harder of her.

"We were," she answered in a tone so delicately frosted that Langrishe looked quickly at her to see if it were really she who spoke. "We shall be very pleased to see you at El-Armut, Mrs. Waring, if you think it worth while to stop at what I hear is a rather dull little place."

"Anything is worth while that brings one near one's friends," smiled Heloise Waring. "Thank you a thousand times, dear people. I shall be delighted to pay you a little visit as soon as the honeymoon is over. But I must not keep you now. You look tired after your journey, Mrs. Langrishe. I'll see you later."

"Which means that I'm looking old and plain," thought Pamela resentfully, as she turned away with the deadening conviction that for her, at least, the honeymoon was already over. Their happy isolation was gone.

"Will you lie down a little before dinner, Pam?" asked Langrishe, when they reached their room.

"Indeed I will not!" cried Pamela. "I want to be like a spider and have eyes all round my head, so that I'll miss nothing."

"I think you'd better rest, all the same. You must be tired after your journey."

Pamela shot a quick glance at him. "What makes you think so? What Mrs. Waring said?"

"Partly that, partly my own observation. Look here, little girl"—he turned to her suddenly. "You weren't very cordial to Mrs. Waring, you know."

"Wasn't I?"

"No, sweetheart," he answered, so gently that her flicker of anger died as swiftly as it had risen. "I never heard a more perfunctory invitation. I can't have that, you know, Pam."

"No?" she queried, mutinous once more.

"No!" he answered firmly. "When I ask a friend to my house I expect you to back up my invitation, and as if you meant it, too!"

"But I didn't in this instance."

Langrishe smiled as he put his hand on her shoulders, and looked down at the face that still showed its feelings so transparently. A note of authority rang in his tone as he continued: "Especially in this instance, Pam."

"Why?"

"Because Heloise Waring is an old friend of mine and was a dear friend of my wife's."

"Damer!" He could not have hurt her more. "Aren't I your wife?" A lump rose in Pamela's throat, choking her.

"Of course you are, you goose! But don't you see that it's as much for your own sake as for mine that I want you to be nice to Heloise? I don't wish her, or any old friend, to say that you have changed me toward them. It would reflect on your dignity and on mine to think that either of us could be capable of such conduct."

"My dignity! Oh, dear!" Pamela gulped, swallowed her pride, and put a hand on either side of Langrishe's hard-tanned face. "I see what you mean, you serious old

thing, and I'm sorry I was such a little beast. I'll be as nice as I can to Mrs. Waring. I'll tell her, if you like, that I really meant my invitation this afternoon."

"Don't do anything of the sort," cried Langrishe in mock alarm. "My good child, it would only rub in the fact that you didn't."

"Would it?" She put her cheek against his. "Then what can I do to please you?"

"Get into a dressing-gown and lie down on the couch for an hour. Here! Give me the key of your suit-case and I'll get it out for you. Hold out your feet: I'll take off your shoes. You *have* feet, Pam; dear little feet!" He caressed the arch of each silk-clad instep as he deftly drew off her shoes. Then he bent to kiss her.

"Pam, you're very young, in many ways, for your twenty-eight years. You don't mind my telling you little things, do you?"

CHAPTER XIII

JUNE AND OCTOBER

PAMELA flushed. "I mind your having to tell me," she answered honestly. "I hope you won't need to again."

"Dearest!" His arms were around her, his quick lips on hers. "Don't you know what you are to me? I wouldn't change you in the least particular. Don't think I'm finding fault, my darling. It's only—"

"Sure, I know it's only—" she whispered very softly. "Didn't I ask you on our wedding day to tell me—"

"Pam, dearest," he interrupted passionately. "The difference between our wedding day and to-day is 'as moonlight unto sunlight, and as water unto wine.' Isn't it the same with you?"

"It is," she murmured. "Sure, you know it is."

"My own girl! My sweetheart!" He kissed her eyes, her throat, her lips, and left her spent after a shower of caresses.

As she lay there with closed eyes thinking of all the formless, shadowy fears which had fled before the light of his growing love, she realized that life, in spite of its moments of joy and ecstasy, was made up in the main of the trivial. By fitting oneself to face the little things undismayed one found oneself ultimately armed against the greater happenings.

"Two things I must remember," she told herself before sleep laid a soothing finger on her eyelids; "one is to make myself a mask, so that they who run—or float—

may not read. The other is never to forget that Cousin Helena's friends are sacrosanct. I hope to goodness she hadn't many! One is almost enough to exhaust my powers of politeness!"

She woke an hour or so later to find Langrishe standing by her side, a bunch of long-stemmed pink roses in his hands.

"How long have you been here?" she cried, blinking sleepily at him.

"Only a minute. I thought you'd like these."

"They're heavenly. Thanks, ever so much." She laid her sleep-flushed cheek against them caressingly, then put a hand on his sleeve. "You've been with other men. There's a nice, cigarry, manny smell about you."

"Is there?" Langrishe smiled. "I met a chap I used to know in India, and he took me along to the club."

"Good!" cried Pamela. "I love to hear of your being with your own kind."

She was not even going to play at having him on a toy rein, she told herself proudly.

"You've just time for a bath before dinner."

"Splendid!" Pamela slipped off the sofa for anything. "I shan't feel really clean till dinner. It seems so long since this morning."

Langrishe thought that she looked younger when she presented herself later for his inspection, in a black tulle with a Nattier blue sash knotted loosely round her hips, a blue ribbon in her soft, dark hair, and his pendant gleaming on her breast. Thrusting one of his roses into her sash, she asked, half-shyly, half-provocatively:

"Will I pass muster, do you think, Damer?"

"You pretty thing!"

"Ah, but I'm not pretty, my dear."

"What are you, then?"

"Great Aunt Lucilla says I am well-looking enough for a man's second venture," she smiled. "Do you agree?"

He caught his breath for an instant, feeling suddenly as if he looked at her across a gulf of years. Cloak it as he would with his boyishness of spirit or zest of living, his youth was over. What right had he to bind this radiant young creature to his sober middle age?

Pamela, looking for approbation, saw the grim distance in his eyes, and it frightened her.

"Don't, Damer!" she cried. "Don't put me away from you like that."

He drew her to him, wondering at her intuition.

"Pam! Little girl!"

"No, no!" she cried wildly, moving restlessly in his arms. "I'm not a little girl! Don't call me that. You stifle me. I'm not even a girl at all. I'm a woman—your woman, aren't I, Damer?"

"Of course you are," he soothed. "My own dear woman."

"You're not like that. You must never think me too old for anything; never pretend to be old or aloof."

"I could stand that. Do you think me an old woman?" she exclaimed, sobering suddenly.

"I think you want your dinner," he returned prosaically, but he squeezed her arm as he said it.

She was flushed with excitement and a touch of shame at her outburst as she entered the big dining-room by his side. She would have liked to think, for his sake, that she was creating a sensation, but modesty, that virtue so inculcated by the candid comments of younger sisters, forbade such a flattering implication.

Yet if Pamela Langrishe were not strictly beautiful, she owned a sparkle, an attraction that drew more than

one pair of eyes to her as she moved to their table with her husband.

Heloise Waring, in particular, looked up eagerly at their entry, from the special corner where she was dining with some friends. Her expression changed subtly at sight of Pamela's unexpected freshness.

"Look! There are the bride and bridegroom I was telling you about," she murmured to Mrs. Talbot. "She came out on the *Syria* with me."

"Those two who have just come in?"

"Yes."

"Not May and December exactly," said Mrs. Talbot brightly. "June and October rather."

"More like July and August," returned Heloise Waring, with a sweetness designed to distract attention from the bitterness of her words. "She must be over thirty, and he's only about forty. His first wife was a friend of mine, so I know."

"She doesn't look that," mused Mrs. Talbot. "Her complexion——"

"Complexions are so easily bought!" smiled Mrs. Waring. "Still, Pamela Langrishe has a wonderfully fresh effect for her age, I must say. She is the type that cannot sparkle without a man, though. She was as dull as ditchwater, her chaperon told me, until a youth she knew came aboard at Marseilles. After that she grew rejuvenated. It's evidently the same now."

"I know the type."

Mrs. Talbot smiled and changed the conversation, wondering how the bride had fallen foul of her friend.

"I suppose Heloise wanted the young man for herself," she thought charitably. "It couldn't have been the husband, for he was all those miles away. Poor Heloise

herself is never happy unless she has a man. How blind some people are!"

Heloise Waring had never paused to analyse the secret of her feelings towards Pamela. It was a complex emotion, based upon an undeniable substratum of envy. Without admitting it, she was vaguely jealous of the girl's young charm, of the youth that was no longer her own, whose gifts were one by one slipping from her eager, clutching hands.

True, her skin was still white and smooth, her eyes bright and clear. Her bill for face creams and lotions was no concern of anyone but herself. If she frequently washed her hair with a shampoo which brightened its fading tints, every fair-haired woman did the same.

Heloise Waring valued her position as wife of a man so absorbed in his work as to leave her absolutely free, and so simple in his tastes that the spending of his not inconsiderable fortune was almost entirely in her hands, far too highly to jeopardise it by any other than the most open and platonic of friendships. These, as far as they went, she jealously safeguarded. The young men whom she so charmingly mothered must have no other substitute maternity than her own. Her great ambition, unrealised as yet, was to be the Egeria of some rising young statesman or diplomatist. Failing that, to be the inspiration of a really successful man would be no inconsiderable makeshift.

Searching her horizon for promising dawns, a chance meeting with Sir John Crooke, the millionaire contractor, had directed her regard to Damer Langrishe, of whom he spoke as a coming man on whom he had his eye.

He had vanished from her ken, more or less, with the death of his wife, but now, following the direction of Sir

John's eye, she was rather surprised to find how large he suddenly bulked. Putting two and two together, she decided that the resultant sum indicated a winter in Egypt. Thither she repaired to wait events with a confidence based on the good fortune which usually attended her little ventures.

Filled with big, vague hopes and formless desires which needed but the touch of the concrete to transform them into something largely definite, Heloise Waring had stepped on board of the *Syria* at Marseilles, only to be confronted at the outset by this pert little David of a girl, whose sling held stones enough to slay untimely every one of her shadowy Goliaths.

That had been the unadmitted head and front of Pamela's offending. With a fresh young wife no man would want a mature Egeria, at least not yet.

The saving clause sprang to buttress hope in Heloise Waring's breast.

A brainless flirt like Pamela could not content any man like Damer Langrishe for long. The time would surely come when he would turn for sympathy and understanding to a woman of his own day and generation, a woman who knew the world of men and things as she knew it; not this—this flighty rustic, with nothing but a flippant tongue and a pair of ridiculously blue eyes to commend her.

After dinner she found herself speaking to the "flighty rustic" with forgiving sweetness.

"I want you and Damer to meet my friends, Mr. and Mrs. Talbot and Major Lundy. Will you have coffee on the terrace with us? It's rather nice there in the evenings."

"It sounds delightful," said Pamela as cordially as she could, remembering her ante-prandial lecture. "But,

you see, everything is new and fresh to me. Until now I have been so seldom out of Ireland."

"Except for your little trip to Cornwall last summer," Mrs. Waring reminded her.

"Oh, I've been in England a couple of times," Pamela said lightly, casting a glance towards her husband to see if he noticed how she had profited by her lesson.

Mrs. Waring noticed the look, and drew her own conclusions.

"Ahmed will bring our coffee to my own special table," she said. "This one in the corner over here."

"I say, you have the knack of securing topping places, Mrs. Waring," declared Major Lundy, a fair, youthful-looking man.

Mrs. Waring smiled at him. "I assure you they come to me," she answered. "I must be one of the lucky ones of the earth, for I never have to struggle for anything."

"That must be shockingly bad for your character," Langrishe said with a laugh.

"It's formed by now," she demurred.

"I should say that the only one of us who is at all malleable still is Mrs. Langrishe," said Mrs. Talbot, glancing round the group, her gaze resting on Pamela, who was gaily chattering about hunting to her husband.

She met Mrs. Talbot's eyes at the challenge.

"I'm afraid even my education isn't yet complete," she admitted. "I'm still learning English grammar! My husband declares that I don't know the difference between shall and will!"

"That girl is no flirt," thought Mrs. Talbot, noting the limpid sincerity of Pamela's regard. "I wonder why Heloise has got her knife in her? She is several years on the sunny side of thirty still, I'm sure, and I'll bet my bottom dollar that she never bought her complexion."

Aloud she quoted the hackneyed example: "*I will be drowned! I will be drowned! No one shall save me!*" That's what your fellow-countryman said, isn't it, Mrs. Langrishe?"

"I'm sure I don't know. What fellow-countryman?"

"Perhaps it was Mr. Doran," Mrs. Waring put in, with an inscrutable smile. "What part of Egypt is he in now, Mrs. Langrishe?"

"You ought to know better than I," Pamela returned, flushing a little in spite of herself.

"Do you mean to say he hasn't written to you? How very remiss of him!"

"Why would he write to me? He doesn't even know my address."

"What Doran is that?" Langrishe asked.

Pamela turned to him with a swift sense of relief.

"It's Tim Doran. One of the Ballyclough Dorans, don't you remember? No; I think they had left before you came to Carrigrennan that last time. I told you he was on the *Syria* as far as Port Said, didn't I?"

"Did you? I'd forgotten," returned Langrishe indifferently.

"She never told him. She's brazening it out now because we're here," thought Heloise Waring with a little thrill of triumph.

"I wonder if you mean Tubby Doran?" asked Major Lundy.

"Tubby?" echoed Pamela.

"He was attached to the R. A. F. when we were at Cambrai. We called him Tubby because he was such a tall, thin chap. Very freckled. Spoke with a drawl."

"That must have been Tim," cried Pamela excitedly. "We called him 'turkey egg' when we were children, on account of his freckles."

Mrs. Talbot laughed, and shot a glance at Heloise Waring, a glance which said as plainly as words; "I've heard many odd love names, but never one so blatantly unsentimental as 'turkey egg'!"

The almost imperceptibly shrugged shoulders and lifted eyebrows seemed to answer: "You never can tell to what depths of duplicity this over-apparent frankness may descend."

The sudden rhythm of dance music beat out upon the warm night air. Pamela lifted her head to listen.

Major Lundy, noting the movement, and responding to it, leaned across towards her.

"There's a dance on here to-night, Mrs. Langrishe. Would you care to have a turn?"

"I'd love it," cried Pamela, her eyes sparkling at the prospect. "But——" she looked round the circle dubiously, "did anybody else want to dance?"

Mrs. Talbot rose. She was feeling bored. There would probably be several men she knew in the ballroom.

"Let's all go," she suggested.

"Damer, won't you come?"

Langrishe, smiling, took out his half-smoked cigar. "Run away and play, little girl; I'll bring Mrs. Waring in presently, if she cares to come."

Under a calm exterior, Heloise Waring's pulses began to throb. She had not pulled her strings in vain, after all. Was not this big puppet already beginning to dance to her manipulation?

He sat there, well content, enjoying the fragrance of an excellent cigar and the society of a clever woman, who employed all the arts at her command to please him.

CHAPTER XIV

PAMELA BEGINS TO MAKE A HOME

THE garden of the house at El-Armut was the strangest that Pamela, used as she was to the perfumed luxuriance, the tangled wealth of Irish green, had ever seen.

There were no vivid lawns to set off the gay mosaic of flowers; no grass even; no beds, no borders as she knew them. Nothing but tracts of bare earth divided by flaming hedges of poinsettias or hibiscus and studded formally, as in some mediæval picture, with great rose-bushes, oleanders or orange-trees, each standing in its own dry, scooped-out well.

These the gardener filled twice daily with water from a shaggy goat-skin, procured from the sakkiyeh, or water-wheel, at the end of the garden. This, turned by a fawn bullock driven by a small boy, stretched along the shaft, sent a circling chain of earthenware pots down into the Nile below, which came up, spilling jewels of gold and silver water over their dripping, red sides.

The house, too, cream-washed and square, with its flat-topped roof and green sun-shutters, was unlike the houses she had hitherto known. The rooms were bare and lofty; the furniture, hastily procured, followed no definite scheme of decoration.

Pamela thought the place empty, and unhomelike; the garden strangely unloveable. Only the view appealed; the great stretch of gleaming river with its farther palm-fringed shore, behind which the spurs of the Arabian

Hills rose tan and amber against a brilliantly blue sky; its sandy islets and its drifting Nile-boats, beautiful with their great peaked sails tilted like butterflies' wings against the shimmer of water, their high prows painted in faded reds and yellows; their cargoes of dead gold straw and snowy limestone adding another touch of colour-magic to the fantasy.

Langrishe found no fault with anything. He plunged at once into his work with a zest that showed a new side of him to Pamela.

If she had not been so busy she might have felt lonely at first, for there were only three other English women in the place, the wives of the bank manager, the English judge and the irrigation inspector. With the latter, Mrs. Durrant, she felt most at home.

Mrs. Durrant was a gentle, rather pretty young woman of about thirty, who had been married for six years and had two fascinating babies. She lived in another house on the river-bank nearer town than the Langrishes' abode; and she took Pamela under her wing from the very first.

"We're both engineering and irrigation people after a fashion," she said with a smile that showed quite a girlish dimple. "We must stick together."

Pamela was nothing loth.

"I like your big man," Mrs. Durrant chattered on. "He makes such a delightful contrast to my little one! Jim has a great opinion of him, which, however, has nothing to do with his inches."

"Mr. Durrant is a dear," began Pamela enthusiastically, then checked herself. When would she learn to control her emotions and keep people guessing as to what she felt?

Mrs. Durrant laughed.

"You don't want an exchange, I hope, for I warn you that it wouldn't be of the least use."

"No, I don't want an exchange," answered Pamela decisively, knowing that she would not change her man for anyone else in the world. Then she returned to business. "Now, Mrs. Durrant, what about those curtains? You promised me your advice."

With Mrs. Durrant's invaluable help, Pamela procured some deep blue native cotton, with which she covered chairs and couches, and hung as curtains for her tall drawing-room windows. She had brought with her some lengths of gaily-patterned cretonnes, in boldly harmonious tones of green and orange, terra-cotta and blue, of which she made cushions innumerable.

Down in the native bazaar she bought some cheap but beautifully shaped jars of red earthenware, which she filled with branches of flaming oleanders and a shrub whose name she did not know, which had tight bunches of blossoms in every shade of yellow, from the palest sulphur to deepest saffron, glowing amid its small green leaves.

When she had put out some of her photographs and wedding-presents, she sat down to look at what she had done with a little glow of pride, longing for Damer to come home and admire her handiwork.

The little silver clock on the high mantelpiece chimed a clear, assertive four. Pamela sighed. He would not be in for at least half an hour. When he came he would probably bring some man or other with him. Mr. Marshall, who was at work on the Barrage, Mr. Durrant or perhaps M. de Marsac, a young Frenchman who was in charge of some excavations outside the town, towards the foot of the tawny Libyan Hills.

Pamela, with a half smile, reflected that she had not met as many men in the whole of her previous life as she had done since she set out on her great adventure. Egypt was truly a man's country, she thought, remembering her husband's words. A sphinx with her hands full of gifts, which the immemorial mystery of her eyes, the eternal secret of her smile, dared them to wrest from her.

She was still wondering what she would do to fill up the intervening half-hour when a slight stir in the hall without attracted her attention. An instant later, and Hassan, the tall servant, dignified in flowing robe of striped, lemon-tinted silk and red tarbûsh, opened the door and announced:

"Mista Done to see the sitt."

Mr. Done! Another stranger to call upon her!

Pamela rose to greet the unknown, only to find her hands warmly grasped by a beaming Tim Doran.

"Why, Timsy, where did you spring from? What a lovely surprise!" she cried in genuine delight.

"I sprang from Tahta, not so far up the river. I heard just by chance yesterday that a chap named Langrishe had come to the Barrage here, and wondering if by any chance it was your Langrishe I came down to prospect to-day."

"And it was my Langrishe!" cried Pamela excitedly. "Oh, Tim, you lamb, you couldn't have come at a better time. I had just finished settling the drawing-room and wanted someone to admire it. What do you think of it?"

"I think it's absolutely tophole," answered Doran enthusiastically.

The fact that he had about as much artistic taste as a tomtit could carry across a bog, mattered to neither of them.

"I'm so glad you like it. I hope Damer will. He hasn't seen it since it was finished," said Pamela. "Sit down, Tim dear, and tell me all about everything."

"There's nothing much to tell, Pam. I'm feeling very fit. My stable companion's an awfully decent chap named Gray. I like my job and I think the country's all right. There you have it in a nutshell."

Pamela laughed happily.

"It *is* good to see you again, Timsy! I was beginning to feel as if I had been enchanted away from everything and everyone I'd ever known. I haven't had any home letters yet, because we left India again almost directly I'd landed. I'm expecting a nice fat mail this week. But tell me more about yourself. You're looking better."

"I'm feeling as fit as a fiddle. My jolly old work is great sport, Pam, and I get on with the Arab johnnies a treat."

"I'm sure you do." She hesitated for a moment, then, womanlike, delayed for his romance. "Have you—have you left off caring for that girl, Tim?"

Doran screwed up his eyes and laughed all over his comical freckled face.

"You're a funny kid, Pam, in spite of your being married!"

"Funny? In what way?" she asked, stiffening a little.

"Don't you know that a chap doesn't leave off caring just like that all at once?"

Underneath his surface gaiety Pamela divined a hurt at her non-comprehension. This affair had gone deeper than she had thought. She hastened to make amends.

"Forgive me, Timsy boy! I didn't understand."

"Tell me about yourself," Doran commanded a little gruffly. "You're looking ripping, I must say. A different

girl from what you were on the *Syria*. I needn't ask if you're happy."

"I am. I am indeed," she answered softly, her face lit up as with some inner joy.

"Then you ought to have known." Doran looked at her for a moment, half in wonder, half in envy, wholly curious as to what manner of man this Langrishe was who had illumined his old playfellow like this.

He knew a moment later when the door opened to admit two men, Langrishe and a slight, dark man of medium height with clipped moustache above a wary mouth, and eyes which looked a trifle weary with all they had seen.

"I've brought de Marsac back to tea, Pam," Langrishe said, then stopped at sight of the unexpected stranger.

Pamela rose, vivid in her excitement.

"Damer, the most delightful surprise! My old friend, Tim Doran, who came out as far as Port Said on the *Syria* with me. Tim, my husband. M. de Marsac, Mr. Doran."

Langishe took Doran's hand in his usual warm grip. He rather liked the look of this young fellow, with his freckled face and honest eyes.

The two younger men bowed, eyeing each other almost as might two dogs about to fight. One of those reasonless, instinctive antagonisms, impossible to analyse, sprang to birth in that instant's regard.

"A graceless English cub!" was the flick of de Marsac's contemptuous thought.

"A mincing French dancing-master!" growled Doran's insular prejudice, unimpaired in this instance by having fought side by side with Frenchmen who minced no more than he did himself.

Conversation became general with the advent of tea. After a little, as usually was the case, it merged into "shop" with the two engineers.

"Let us leave them to their technicalities, M. de Marsac," said Pamela at last. "Come out on the terrace with me and watch the Nile boats. I never tire of them."

"Ah, that appreciation of beauty, madame, it is the gift of *le bon Dieu*," said de Marsac softly. He spoke excellent English, for which Pamela was truly thankful, as her French did not even approach the standard of Stratford-atte-Bowe.

De Marsac was a student of mankind, a specialist in women. Pamela was a new type to him, and he was an electric amateur of new types. Some quality of freshness, of unexpectedness about her attracted him, but not amatively. She held no spark to fire him, no lure to entice him from the path of fidelity to a man whom he liked as much as he did Langrishe.

"This white-heart cherry has not my savour," he admitted, half virtuously, half reluctantly.

He had the arts to charm women at his finger-tips, and he set himself out now to amuse his hostess.

After all, a pretty woman was always a pretty woman, the more intriguing perhaps if she still had something to learn. An hour in the sunshine by flowing water, in rose-scented air, was a little gift of the gods not to be lightly tossed away after days spent among mummies and the dry bones of a dead civilisation.

Presently Hassan came, soft-footed, in his yellow slippers, across the terrace to them with a silver tray full of letters.

"I cannot find the Mafettish, ya sitt," he said. "I brought these to you."

"I'll give them to him presently," answered Pamela, putting out an eager hand.

As she took them one letter fell to the ground, a square,

azure-tinted envelope addressed to Langrishe in large, bold characters.

De Marsac made careless comment as he handed it back to her.

"There is much character in that writing," he said. Pamela glanced at it.

"It's from my stepdaughter," she returned.

"Your stepdaughter," echoed de Marsac. "But how amusing!"

"Why amusing, M. de Marsac?"

"It is indeed droll to think of you, *chère madame*, with a stepdaughter. She is a school-girl, then, this little one?"

"Not now. She is grown up. We hope to have her out with us later on," answered Pamela, feeling very matronly and dignified.

"Ah! *Une jeune fille à marier, donc!*" said de Marsac, dropping instinctively into his own tongue.

Pamela hastily answered his thought rather than his words.

"Oh, no, not yet! Dido is much too young to get married. She's only eighteen."

"There are different eighteens," mused de Marsac. "It is all a matter of temperament. In my own country still the *jeune fille* is guarded very much. She is like *La Belle au Bois Dormant*," he continued, with a rather attractive smile. "One must enter the rose-hedge by the door of marriage before one can arrive at the sleeping princess. In your country, madame, the princess is not always asleep beforehand."

"Is she always in your country, M. de Marsac?" queried Pamela idly, her thoughts reverting to her own case.

Damer and she had had to plunge through the rose-hedge in order to find each other. Suppose that only

thorns had been their portion? Suppose that the roses had never been for their plucking? She shivered a little.

De Marsac, faintly piqued at the obvious wandering of her thoughts, rose to take his leave.

"You will want to read your letters," he said, bowing over her hand. "*Au revoir, chère madame*, and a thousand thanks for your most charming hospitality."

Left to herself Pamela hastily tore open the home letters that literally seemed to bring with them the breath of bog air, the veritable scent of mist-haunted hills and purple heather, dwelling on every homely little detail with a hunger whose sharpness she had not realised until now that it was satisfied.

At last, with a sigh of content, she looked up, to see Langrishe coming towards her across the terrace.

She went to meet him, her hands full of tumbled sheets.

"Grand home letters!" she cried. Then: "Where's Tim? Has he gone without saying good-bye to me?"

"No, he's just gone to pay his respects to Mrs. Durrant. I asked him to come back to dinner. I'd have asked de Marsac, too, only——"

"He went some little time ago," said Pamela. She slipped her hand through her husband's arm. "Never mind them now. I want to have you to myself for a little. Damer, I was just dying for you to come back this afternoon."

"Were you, sweetheart? Why?" He stretched out his hand for his letters and began to open them as she spoke.

"I wanted you to see the drawing-room. I had it finished just as Tim came. What did you think of it?"

"The drawing-room?" he echoed absently. "Oh, I thought it looked topping!" He slit open another envelope and sat down on the parapet.

Pamela felt a quick stab of disappointment.

"I don't believe you noticed it at all."

"Eh, little girl?" He looked up at her tone. "I did, indeed; I saw that you had some of the jars the women carry on their heads, with flowers stuck in them."

Pamela's rush of feeling silenced her. Did anyone ever make such a stupid, unsatisfactory comment on a person's artistic efforts? *Water jugs with flowers stuck in them!* Here was she, spending her days in trying to make a home for Damer, and this was all he had to say about it! The worst of it was that he never even noticed her disappointment.

He looked up to demand her interest from where he sat on the terrace wall, below which the river sucked and gurgled at the stone embankment.

"This is from Sir John Crooke himself. He's coming out after Christmas to see how the work's progressing. We must have him to stay, Pam."

"Of course, if you wish it," Pamela answered in a choked voice.

Langrishe read on in silence, then shot a glance at her, half rueful, half amused.

"I say, Pam, isn't she a monkey?"

"Who? What?" asked Pam, a trifle tartly.

"Dido. She writes to say she's on her way out here, or will be rather, when this letter reaches me. Didn't I tell you she was a handful? The moment she heard we were to be in Egypt, she says, she felt that she couldn't stay in England any longer. She had to follow the sun!" Langrishe paused and looked across the river, now a sheet of molten gold reflecting hills of tawny light.

The sky above was burning blue, flecked with swathes and feathers of golden cloud, dazzling in their brilliance, until the sun sank suddenly behind the Libyan horizon.

The effect was swift as that of a blown-out flame. The hills dulled to bronze, the river darkened save where the ripples slashed it with silver, the golden clouds turned amber.

Langrishe repeated musingly:

"Follow the sun. Now who did I hear use those very words the other day?"

"Your friend Mrs. Waring, probably," returned Pamela icily. "It's a stock phrase of hers."

Langrishe turned at her tone.

"Pam. What is it?"

"Oh, nothing."

"Come here." Langrishe held out a compelling hand. Pamela moved reluctantly to put hers into it. "What's the matter with you, little girl? Are you annoyed at the idea of Dido's coming out or what?"

Pamela's spurt of annoyance flickered out.

"Or what," she murmured. "It is because you took no interest in the drawing-room, Damer."

"Good Heavens, child, what more could I say? Didn't I tell you it was topping? Didn't I even notice the old goulahs full of flowers? What more does the infant want?"

Damer put his arm around her as he spoke, half amused, half exasperated.

"You mustn't be such a baby, dear," he said, in a tone which made her want to shake him. "Aren't you always telling me what a woman you are?"

"I am."

"Well——" he shrugged his big shoulders.

"You will be wanting some furbelows for Dido's room. I'll write you a cheque to-morrow."

"I don't want money. What's money?" cried the

girl who had never had any. "What can money buy? Nothing! Nothing that matters."

"You're right there, sweetheart," said Langrishe, in a tone that soothed her unreasonable annoyance. "It can't buy what I've got anyhow, Pam. When are you going to kiss me again?"

"I didn't know you wanted me to."

"Didn't you?" Langrishe laughed, swung to his feet and took her in his arms. "Didn't you, indeed, you dear silly baby?"

Their lips met and Pamela's powers of resistance melted suddenly. Nothing mattered in that moment of love's renewal, not even the wonderful afterglow, which turned the clouds to giant rose-petals, the hills to a flame-tipped wonder, and touched the river with a roseate radiance.

CHAPTER XV

DIDO MAKES HER BOW

PAMELA worked hard at her Arabic in the mornings, her ambition being to take her cook's accounts in his native tongue. The venerable Arab who was her tutor assured her that six weeks' study ought to enable her to do this, so Pamela had a definite goal in view.

Now that she had slipped into a certain routine the days glided by almost imperceptibly. Damer's work absorbed most of his time, and left her much alone, but gradually Pamela filled the empty hours.

She found herself looking forward to Dido's arrival with an eagerness which rather surprised her. Unconsciously she missed the give and take, the quick come and go of the girlish companionship which had always been hers; missed it even more than she realised. She pictured Dido as another Kitty, spoilt, perhaps, but gay and full of young enthusiasms. More sophisticated than Kitty, probably, with greater initiative and a stronger will. Kitty, for instance, would never have dreamed of setting out for Egypt alone, without as much as "By your leave."

This amused Damer. It rather perturbed Pamela. Sometimes she wondered how it would be when the two wills came in contact; what would happen in the clash? It would be very good for Dido to be mastered. The spoiling process had gone on long enough. Yet at times Pamela's tender heart melted at the thought of a little thwarted Dido, unhappy, and in tears. She could never bear to see Kitty cry, even though she knew that hers

were but April showers, as quickly over as begun. It never occurred to her that Damer might not be able to master his daughter.

Anticipation quickened as the day of the girl's arrival drew nearer. It would be delightful to have someone really young about the place again. Someone who would want her, would lean on her companionship; someone to whom she might be a real genuine friend, and elder sister rather than the traditional step-mother.

That Dido was kindly disposed to her, her one little letter testified. Pamela might not have felt quite so whole-heartedly enthusiastic over her coming had Damer read aloud to her the whole, instead of merely half of Dido's postscript to his own letter:

"Give my love to Pam. It will be rather amusing, Dad, to see you *en secondes noces*."

Langrishe himself was going down to Port Said to meet her. This meant an early start for him and a long, lonely day for Pamela which left several hours un-filled even after she had done every necessary and unnecessary thing of which she could think. At last she had the inspiration of sending a note to Mrs. Durrant to invite her to tea with her, and she was unfeignedly glad to see her enter her cool, flower-decked drawing-room at four o'clock.

"Have you asked me to come and condole with you?" queried Monica Durrant, as she sank on the divan near the tea-table.

"Condole?" echoed Pamela, a little startled. "Oh you mean on my loneliness."

"No, I mean on being obliged to have your step-daughter out. It is rather a nuisance, isn't it?" she answered, as she pulled off her gloves.

"I never thought of it in that light," cried Pamela. "I'm quite looking forward to Dido's coming. She will be great company for me when Damer's out."

"Well, but when he's in?" pursued Mrs. Durrant with interest. "Will she efface herself then?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know her at all, I think you said."

"I haven't seen her since she was eight, ten years ago," Pamela admitted.

"Where has she been at school?"

"Cheltenham."

"She will be a typical modern girl, then," mused Mrs. Durrant. "Do forgive me for being so personal, but do you know anything of the modern girl?"

"I know myself and my sisters," answered Pamela, flushing a little. "And, of course, all the other girls in our neighbourhood, but—"

"Ah, but that's just it," interrupted Mrs. Durrant. "Of course, Miss Langrishe may be just as natural and unaffected as you are, but yet again, she may not."

"I asked you to come and cheer me up," Pamela reproached her.

Mrs. Durrant smiled.

"I know. It's horrid of me to be so pessimistic, but do you know, I've often wondered how any woman could have the courage to become a step-mother!"

"Why? Is it such a very difficult position?"

"My dear, it is an impossible one! To make it a success one would require the tact of a diplomatist, the forbearance of an angel, the patience of Job and Griselda rolled into one, to say nothing of the wisdom of the serpent and the gentleness of the dove!"

"You terrify me!" cried Pamela. "For I'm afraid I have none of those qualities in any superlative degree."

"You have your own share of them," Mrs. Durrant assured her. "Probably your charge will give you no trouble. You have plenty of men to amuse her at any rate."

"Men?" echoed Pamela, seeing a rather alarming vista of possibilities.

Mrs. Durrant nodded wisely.

"Miss Dido will probably have the time of her life here. Just think of all those nice young men at the Barrage, to say nothing of your dear Mr. Doran and the fascinating M. de Marsac? Of them all I should say that the latter is the only one who is in the least dangerous."

"Do you think M. de Marsac dangerous?" asked Pamela perturbed.

"He might be to a young girl. The attraction of sex——" she broke off. "He—there is something unusual about him. He—has an undoubted effect on women, I think. Oh, yes; he might certainly be classed as dangerous."

"Damer likes him."

"So does Jim. He says he's a very decent chap. But—he's not a woman!"

"Perhaps he won't appeal to Dido."

"It will all depend on her temperament. Oh, I don't mean to be intense or anything of that sort," Mrs. Durrant went on, shaking up a cushion behind her. "I am a great believer in girls buying their own experience and learning their world for themselves, only——"

"Only what?" queried Pamela anxiously.

"Only—I don't like young things to be hurt," confessed Mrs. Durrant softly. "And an innocent young girl would have very little chance against a fascinating man of the world like de Marsac, if he set himself out to make love to her."

"Ah, but in France——" began Pamela eagerly.

"We're not in France now, my dear," Monica Durrant reminded her. "Nor even in England. We're in the hot-blooded East, where girls are women at twelve, and a flower will bloom and die in an hour!"

"You frighten me," Pamela breathed.

"I don't mean to. In plain English, I suppose what I am really trying to say is that de Marsac isn't a marrying man."

"Oh, is that all?"

Mrs. Durrant nodded. To her half-amused, half-pitying intuition, Pamela Langrishe's relief was the very measure of her unsophistication. Monica Durrant's own youth had known the very experience from which she would fain have shielded Dido Langrishe, only she did not yet know Pamela sufficiently well to tell her so. She had come, like old Mrs. Carey, safely into harbour since then, bringing a cargo of quiet joys to port, but it had been a bitter ordeal, and had laid a touch as of frost upon her youth.

She turned the subject now to some wonderful witticism of Winkle and Twinkle, her babies. Pamela was an excellent listener. Her blue eyes sparkled or grew tender, her warm, generous mouth widened to a smile or curved in a wondering sweetness at the mother's recital.

As Mrs. Durrant rose to go, she laid her hand on the other's arm.

"I do hope you'll have babies of your own," she exclaimed impulsively. "You'd like to, wouldn't you?"

"I've always wanted dozens!" cried Pamela, blushing rosily.

"Come home and have dinner with me, and I'll let you

bathe Twinkle. The train isn't due till about nine. I'll see that you are back here in plenty of time."

"I have thought of going to the station," began Pamela, with the hospitable Irish instinct of meeting the welcome guest.

"Then you must unthink the idea at once. Mr. Langrishe wouldn't like it at all, I'm sure."

"Wouldn't he?"

"No. There are always crowds to meet that evening train. It would be most unpleasant for you. Jim shall see you home immediately after dinner if you like, so that you can have a look round here before they arrive."

"How awfully good you are to me!" cried Pamela gratefully. "I don't know what I should have done without you."

"Nonsense, my dear. I've been a bride in a strange country myself and I know just how odd everything feels at first. You're adapting yourself wonderfully, I think."

"We Irish are supposed to be adaptable people," said Pamela.

She felt a surge of gratitude towards this kindly woman who had taken pity on her loneliness and admitted her into the personal intimacy of her home.

As she stood in Dido's bedroom later, looking round to see that nothing had been forgotten, she planned a little dinner-party in the girl's honour: just the Durrants and themselves and—yes—Tim Doran. Matchmaking plans bubbled to the surface of her mind. Tim should be the only young man. He should have a chance of meeting Dido before any of the others. How delightful if anything really came of it! Dido, little Dido, Damer's only child, ought to be nice enough to erase the memory of that other girl from dear old Timsy's mind!

The sound of wheels on the drive below sent Pamela flying down the stairs.

A rose-shaded lamp standing on a table placed against a black mushrabiyyeh screen suffused the hall with a mellow glow, softening its barenness.

Pamela, slim and girlish in her simple wedding-frock, with a rose tucked into her belt, ran with outstretched hands to meet the travellers as they entered.

"Well, Pam, here we are. I've brought you your new daughter, you see!" Langrishe's voice held, besides its touch of pride, a ring of some other emotion which Pamela could not interpret. What was it—amusement, curiosity, apprehension? Or a mingling of all three? She did not know.

A little figure stepped into the rosy pool of lamplight, small almost as the child Dido, Pamela thought, at her first startled glance. A little figure dressed in the last word of smartness, in a fawn travelling coat, suède shoes and silk stockings, close little fawn hat with one daring orange quill twined round its brim. A white-skinned face, elfin in its peaked prettiness, was turned up to be kissed as two great dark eyes, incongruous in such a setting, took full stock of the welcoming figure.

"But how absurd, dad," cried a silver-clear, high-pitched voice. "I think it is Pam who looks young enough to be my daughter, not I hers."

"'Pon my word, Dido, I believe you're right," exclaimed Langrishe, with an amused laugh.

"You're very welcome," said Pamela softly, stooping to kiss this strangely sophisticated stepdaughter, who was so utterly different from what she had expected.

Here was no second Kitty, whatever else she might prove to be!

Dido laughed. The sound was like a clear tinkling

peal of elfin bells, Pamela thought; very pretty and musical, but a trifle soulless withal; it chilled her warm impulses a little.

"Just the same dear old brogue!" she cried. "Pam, you haven't turned a hair since I last saw you all those years ago, in Ireland!"

The aplomb, the exquisite finish and complete assurance of the little creature, made Pamela feel at once large, awkward and insignificant.

"You've changed, Dido," she said. "I'd never have known you."

"I should hope not," Dido answered fervently. "I was very raw material in those days."

"You're a tolerably finished product now, at any rate," smiled Langrishe. "Have you no welcome for me, Pam?"

"Of course I have," exclaimed Pamela, going round to where he stood and putting up her face to his.

Somehow she felt shy of any demonstration before those critical, dark eyes.

Dido smiled faintly as she watched their embrace. She felt in some odd way immeasurably older, immeasurably more sophisticated than these two. She had made tentative explorations of her father's character during the journey from Port Said, and had decided that up to a certain point he was easily manageable. Beyond that point—well, she might never be obliged to go, so the rest lay on the lap of the gods. As for Pamela, she had been rather a lamb in those long ago days. She was probably quite a good sort now, even if a little old-fashioned. Dido by no means made the current mistake of her generation in relegating all the old-fashioned virtues to limbo. She was quite aware that some of them had their uses still, and she was not at all displeased to

find that in no sense could her father's second wife be considered a rival of her own more up to date charms.

Vaguely disappointed Pamela suggested a move upstairs.

"You'd like a wash before your supper," she said. "I've had hot water put in your room."

"I should," returned Langrishe. "I hope you didn't wait dinner for us, Pam. We had something on the train."

"No. I dined with the Durrants. I was thinking of going to the station to meet you, but Mrs. Durrant said she thought you'd rather I didn't."

"Sensible woman. She was quite right."

"This is your room, Dido," said Pamela. "If you haven't everything you want just let me know and I'll get it for you."

Langrishe glanced appraisingly round the cool, white room, with its snowy curtained bed in one corner, its green vase of long-stemmed pink roses on the dressing-table.

"I say, you have made it look nice, Pam! Hasn't she, Dido?"

"Ripping!" returned the girl perfunctorily. To her luxury-loving eyes it looked bare, almost penurious. She tilted a contemptuous little nose at Pam's roses. They were far too banal to please her taste. Scarlet-tongued poinsettias or flaming hibiscus would have suited her better, but she couldn't very well say so. After all, these dear old things were being as decent as they knew how! She pulled off her hat and thrust her fingers through her bobbed mass of red-gold hair.

It was a strange colour, Pamela thought, almost the tint of a brand new penny.

"My room is next door," she said. "And your father's

dressing-room and the bathroom just beyond. Your window opens on to a sort of loggia outside, which runs past my room as well. There's a lovely view of the river from it."

"How ripping!" said Dido. "A river means movement and life. I suppose you can see all the steamers going by?"

"You can. You can see the beginning of the Barrage, too."

Dido sighed luxuriously. She fancied that she was going quite to enjoy her new experience.

Langrishe drew Pamela into their bedroom and shut the door.

"Now kiss me properly," he commanded, putting his arms around her.

Pamela surrendered her lips with a sigh of content, "I thought the day would never end."

"You missed me, then?"

"Of course I missed you."

"And I you." He looked down into her eyes. "Well, Pam?" he questioned significantly.

"Well, Damer?" she echoed, looking back at him with slightly raised brows.

Langrishe wrinkled up his eyes and nose in a comical way. "I believe, Pam, that we've hatched out a phœnix-egg instead of the nice little barn-door chick we were expecting to find! What do you think?"

"I am inclined to agree with you," said Pamela.

CHAPTER XVI

TUBBY

AFTER breakfast next morning Damer Langrishe went off to the Barrage, leaving his womenfolk to make better acquaintance.

Seen by the light of day, Dido proved to be more arresting than merely pretty. Hers was a face so vivid, so full of possibilities, that it would stand out in the memory when other and lovelier women were forgotten.

At morning sight of her Pamela's vague, fond hopes fled like mist before the sun. Here was no little sister, no young nestling to be guarded and carefully launched upon a troublous world. This small winged thing was fully fledged already, and capable of flights before which Pamela's spirit would quail. She had to readjust all her preconceived ideas before they could possibly find any common meeting-ground.

She made tentative advances, which Dido met in a friendly spirit, but the first obvious differences between them were evidenced in their respective trousseaux.

"Show me your things," Dido commanded as soon as Langrishe had left them together.

Pamela, with some pride, had displayed her modest outfit to the dark appraising eyes.

"Quite nice." Dido nodded her golden mop approvingly over one or two items, but shook it at the rest. "You should have gone to some really good woman, Pam, for your decent frocks; Colette, in Sloane Street, is quite good, I believe."

"I couldn't afford to go to any of those really smart places," Pamela admitted disappointedly. "My things are good enough for El-Armut, at any rate. And yours?"

"Oh, mine are far too good," said Dido frankly. "But I got the very latest when I had the chance. Grandad gave me a nice fat cheque, so I went to the best French dressmaker in Cheltenham, a really ripping woman."

"What's the good of having clothes that are too smart to wear here?"

"I'm not going to stay here all the winter, Pam." Dido's eyes shot sparks of mischief.

"Aren't you? What are you going to do, then?" asked Pamela, with a rather helpless feeling.

"I'm going to stay for a while in Cairo with Mrs. Waring."

"Mrs. Waring?"

"Yes. You know her, don't you? We had to wait an hour or so in Cairo yesterday and had tea at Groppi's with her. She suggested it then, and dad seemed quite agreeable. She says she's going to stay with us later on."

"She is. On her way to Luxor," answered Pamela flatly.

"She was a great friend of mother's," Dido rattled on, displaying garment after garment of such exquisite cut and line that Pamela was reduced to the speechless state of the Queen of Sheba. "She has worn awfully well, I must say. As a rule those fair women age rather quickly, but she looks wonderfully fresh still. Poor old Louisa! That was her name originally. I remember mother saying so long ago, but she changed it to Heloise when she was at school, because she thought it sounded more romantic! She's a clever woman in her way, but not quite clever enough to see that the name doesn't

really suit her. She is much too self-centred ever to be *une grande amoureuse!* Don't you agree? Too much of a *poseuse!*"

"I suppose so," Pamela murmured, feeling too dazed to cope with such a flood of candid criticism.

"You're too polite to say so!" laughed Dido. "Well, you need have no consideration for Louisa. She's got her knife into you for some reason or other. She can't have wanted dad for herself, for she's got a husband tucked away somewhere. I believe when her youth began to wane that she got the poor little shrimp into a corner out of which he could back no further, and ordered him to marry her! He's awfully rich, too, I believe. Have you any eligibles here for me, Pam?"

"I—I don't think so," stammered Pamela, taken aback by this sudden thrust. "There are some nice young men here, but no rich ones, as far as I know."

"What do you mean by nice young men?" Dido demanded. "Well-meaning boys or just nonentities? I've no use for either. Don't look so worried, poor lamb! I don't know that I'm specially anxious for eligibles really. It was Grannie's word, not mine. She was always talking about eligible young men. I just want to have a good time."

Pamela had an uneasy feeling that the one person in El-Armut best fitted to give her what she desired was Raoul de Marsac, but, remembering Mrs. Durrant's warning, forebore to mention his name. Dido frankly puzzled her. She had never met anyone in the least like her before; brilliant, strange, elusive as a moonbeam. However, she felt a very human warming towards the girl for her frank disparagement of Heloise Waring, and hoped that they might be friends later on.

"What a pity that you and I are such different sizes,"

Dido continued, deftly sorting and folding the pile of garments tossed on her bed. "I could have passed on some of these to you."

"I have plenty, thanks, my dear. Here, let me help you with those frocks."

Dido stood and looked at her, a pale yellow jumper in her hand.

"Proud!" she mused. "You queer proud thing! But you mustn't be proud with me, mamma! I won't have it. Just to punish you, I'm going to make you take this thing. Grannie gave it to me, but it doesn't suit my type at all." She took out a little pale-blue Chinese coat, exquisitely embroidered in butterflies of every imaginable tint. "Call it my wedding present, if you like!"

She slipped it over Pamela's shoulders and stood away to observe the effect.

"Perfect!" she declared. "Wear that over your straight little white frock and dad will fall in love with you all over again."

She laughed at Pamela's ready blush.

"It's lovely, Dido, child. Thank you ever so much."

Dido put her head on one side and regarded her amusedly.

"No, Pam. Not child, please. I never was a child, if it comes to that. Childhood is soon killed in an Indian hot weather! I was more sophisticated at ten than you are now! Don't look so uncomfortable. It's much better, really. I've been spared a lot of awkwardnesses and pinpricks through knowing my way about. Tell me, though—I'm awfully anxious to know—have you learned yet how to manage dad!"

"What do you mean exactly?"

"Dad can be led but not driven," pursued Dido sagely. "The moment you begin to drive him he jibs at once."

It brings out the obstinate streak in his nature, but I dare say you've found that out already."

"No, I haven't."

"You will if you come up against any of his funny old principles." A queer look flickered across the girl's face and was gone. "He's full of them, you know. And ideals. Cæsar's wife and all that sort of thing."

"And daughter," interposed Pamela significantly.

"And daughter!" Dido echoed, with her thrilling laugh. "Bless you, Mammy Pam, I'm not going to confide my horrid past to dad! He'd have seven fits if he heard some of my escapades!"

"Would he?" said Pam uneasily.

"And you, too, you blessed old innocent!" laughed Dido, completely mistress of the situation. "Here! Pax and chums, Pam. We shan't tell on each other, shall we? We'll make a conspiracy of silence for dad's benefit!"

"I won't tell tales unless you do something outrageous, Dido!"

"Oh, I shan't do anything outrageous—here," answered Dido airily.

Pamela was silent. If she had said half that she wanted to she would have felt priggish. She did not know how much, if any, seriousness lay beneath the girl's flippancy. She wanted her to feel that she had a friend in her. She was half fascinated, half-repelled by her airy volubility.

Dido looked at her, half aware of her thoughts.

"We're going to be quite good friends, old thing," she continued. "That is, if you don't try to influence me, or any tosh of that sort. I foresee that I'm going to be awfully good for you, Pam. Probably for dad,

too. I shall ginger you both up and keep you guessing, as the Americans say."

"Don't make your riddles too hard, then," said Pamela with a funny little smile.

"We'll see. Now tell me how you're going to amuse me."

"Well, there's plenty of tennis in the afternoons, for one thing. The Durrants have a court and there's one over at the Barrage quarters. Your father said something about getting a gramophone and having dancing. We have a piano already."

"Topping! But who is there to dance with?"

Pamela ran off a string of names, ending with Mr. Gray and Tim Doran, who came down sometimes from Tahta.

"Tim Doran?" echoed Dido, with one of her birdlike sideway glances.

"Yes. He's an old friend of mine and a dear." Pamela stopped abruptly, fearing lest she might prejudice the girl against her by over-praise.

"Is that the lot? They don't sound very intriguing!"

Pamela, an inferior actress, brought about the very effect she was desirous of avoiding by her belated mention of the dangerous name.

"Oh, there's M. de Marsac," she answered, with elaborate carelessness. "I almost forgot him."

"Who is he?" Dido pounced on a name as a sparrow on a crumb.

"He's in charge of some excavations outside El-Armut."

"Oh, ripping!" cried Dido. "I hope he'll take me to see them some day and give me a mummy for myself! Have you been yet?"

"Not yet."

"He's French, I suppose."

"He is."

"Good! I can practise my French on him. I'm hot stuff at French, Pam. Do you speak it?"

"Hardly at all." Not for the first time did Pamela desire a better acquaintance with that beautiful tongue.

"What sort of a man is he?"

"Oh, just the average sort of Frenchman, I imagine," Pamela returned cautiously. "Sets himself out to be agreeable and all that kind of thing."

"You're not very good at description. What is he like to look at?"

"Oh, very ordinary. He has smooth, dark hair, sallow skin, and a little dark moustache. He's not a bit romantic-looking, Dido."

"Thank Heaven for that!" returned Dido tersely. "The thought of a romantic-looking man makes me sick!"

Pamela had planned her little dinner-party for the day after Dido's arrival. Being more or less an impromptu affair, it was to be quite informal. A wire to Tim Doran, asking him to dine and sleep, had brought a delighted acceptance, and the Durrants were always ready to avail themselves of any little festivity.

"We can have a bigger affair next week, if you like, and ask everybody," Pamela said to Langrishe. "This is only a sort of welcome home for Dido."

"You and she get on splendidly," Langrishe said in a tone of relief.

"We haven't clashed yet," returned Pam, smiling.

"You won't clash. Why should you?"

"I don't know. There are depths in Dido——"

"She's a pretty thing, isn't she?"

"Fascinating," Pamela agreed. "I shouldn't wonder

if half the young men in El-Armut fell head over heels in love with her."

"Then I'll send them packing," Langrishe declared. "I'm not going to let my little girl marry at eighteen."

Pamela looked at him with amused eyes. "My dear old Damer, do you imagine for an instant that you could possibly prevent her if she wanted to?"

"My dear young Pamela, what else is a father's authority for?"

Pamela made an inarticulate cooing noise, and patted the brown cheek nearest to her. "What indeed?"

But as she looked at him tenderly, in her heart lurked a faint pity for his masculine blindness.

She was ready early on the evening of the dinner-party, as she wanted to be downstairs when Tim Doran arrived. She met him in the hall as she was coming down the stairs.

"My hat, what a peach!" he cried, at sight of her. "Let me look at you!"

Pamela blushed at his frank praise. She was wearing the little Chinese coat over a white frock, as Dido had suggested, and had tied a blue embroidered ribbon to match round her head.

"I'm glad you approve, Timsy," she said. "Your room is at the end of the corridor, next the bathroom. Hurry up and dress and come down."

"Righto. I'm longing to see you in your new rôle of stepmother, Pam. What sort is the kid?"

"Kid?" Pamela laughed. "Hurry down, and you'll see for yourself. Damer isn't back yet. He's late tonight."

Even as she spoke, the hall-door opened behind her and Langrishe entered, blinking a little at the lamplight after the blue dusk outside.

"That you, Doran? Sorry to be so late. Pam, I met de Marsac this afternoon and asked him to dinner to-night."

"Oh, Damer!"

"Well, my dear? Isn't there enough to eat?"

"Oh, plenty," returned Pamela rather flatly.
"Only—"

"An extra man or so doesn't matter at an informal affair like this," answered Langrishe, a little curtly.
"Tell Hassan to lay an extra place."

"Very well." Pamela turned towards the dining-room feeling distinctly ruffled.

All her nice little plans were upset. Tim was not to have his solitary innings after all. Her carefully arranged table had to be disturbed. There would be an odd man at one side. For the first time she deplored Damer's ready hospitality. It was really annoying of him to invite an extra person at the eleventh hour like this.

She gave Hassan his directions and cast a pleased glance at the table decorations, flaming poinsettias floating in shallow, silver bowls, silver candlesticks with flame-coloured shades. Then her heart misgave her for her casual reception of Damer's announcement. After all, wasn't it her heart's desire to please him, to make a home for him? Was it not essential to the home ideal to feel that one could invite whoever one chose to it?

She ran quickly upstairs, eager to make amends for her fancied churlishness, and knocked at the dressing-room door.

Langrishe, in the act of tying his tie, only glanced at her as she entered.

"What is it, Pam? People come? I'll be down in a minute."

Pamela fidgetted with the open case of razors on the dressing-table.

"Oh, no. No one is here but Tim Doran. It's only, I just wanted to say—of course, you must ask whoever you like, whenever you like. I didn't mean—"

"I know that, goose!"

"But I was cross—"

"Oh, no, you weren't. Run along, Pam. Someone may be here."

Pamela went away, closing the door softly behind her, a lump in her throat at her curt dismissal. Damer hadn't understood, hadn't cared, hadn't even seen her tentative olive branch. Oh, men *were* queer!

As she went downstairs Doran's bedroom-door opened. In an instant he had run down to join her. With a feeling as if she were readjusting her newly acquired mask, she turned to him with a smile.

"You were very quick, Timsy. Will you go into the drawing room? I've just remembered something I had to tell Hassan. I'll be with you in a minute."

She turned toward the dining-room door as he crossed the hall, her steps suddenly arrested on its threshold by a clear penetrating exclamation from the drawing-room.

"Tubby! You!"

CHAPTED XVII

A LITTLE DINNER BY THE NILE

THE voice was Dido's. There was no mistaking its bell-like timbre. But what did she mean by calling Tim "Tubby"?

In a flash the memory of Major Lundy's words on the terrace of Shepheard's Hotel came back to her. "Tubby" had been Tim's nick-name in the Air Force. Her brain worked quickly.

"We called him Tubby because he was such a tall, thin chap."

If Dido had really called Tim by his Army nickname it argued a previous acquaintance with him. But if so, why had she not admitted it to her, Pamela, at the first mention of his name?

"Now that I come to think of it, she did say 'Tim Doran' in rather a funny way," thought Pamela. "Perhaps she only knew him as Tubby. But if so why didn't she say so, just as Major Lundy did?"

Slightly puzzled, she gave Hassan his final directions, then crossed the hall to the drawing-room. Her heart-beats quickened slightly as she pushed the door open and went in, to find the room empty. A murmur of voices from without drew her to the open French window. She moved towards it and stood there for an instant, silhouetted against the golden glow of light behind her.

The night air was sweet and cool after the warmth of the house. Beyond the shafts of light which fell across

the terrace the dusk at first seemed impenetrable. A pale blur moved towards her; a low murmur and a higher tinkle of words filtered through the scented air.

"That you, Dido?" she called.

Two figures quickly materialized. Doran's, a splash of white shirt-front against the enveloping darkness, Dido, a golden-yellow butterfly flickering out of the gloom into the shaft of lamplight.

She looked up at Pamela brightly.

"I've been making friends with your Mr. Doran, Pam. I took him to see my favourite bit of the river—that curve up towards El-Armut, where you get a fascinating glimpse of the town with its minarets and palm-trees."

"You couldn't see much in this light," said Pamela bluntly.

"Oh, yes, quite the prettiest effect of all, with the town lights reflected in the water like orange fireflies, and the outline of the minarets against the gorgeous blue dusk. Mr. Doran says they've nothing like it at Tahta."

"No?" said Pamela, indefinite uneasiness stirring within her.

Dido's manner was absolutely natural; gay, unconcerned, with no indication that anything which was not apparent ran below the surface. Yet Pamela wanted to see Doran's face. He still stood in the shadow, silent. Even on the wings of her desire he spoke, but without moving forward.

"It would be a perfect bit for a painter chap," he said in quite an ordinary tone. "Do you know if that fellow de Marsac, paints, Pam? He looks as if he might."

"I don't," she answered. "But you can ask him yourself later on. He's coming to dinner to-night."

"M. de Marsac? You never told me, Pam!" cried Dido reproachfully.

"I didn't know it myself until about ten minutes ago," returned Pamela drily.

She was puzzled and perturbed. Her own crystal-clear frankness seemed to be muddied by the mere suspicion of duplicity in the two before her. Dido she might not be able to read, but Tim——! Surely, if she could see Tim's honest, freckled face she would know if anything was being hidden from her, if secret undercurrents had begun to flow suddenly beneath the tranquil tide of her life.

A stir of arrival in the room behind her roused Pamela to a sense of her duties as hostess. She turned abruptly and went in to greet the Durrants and M. de Marsac, followed after an instant's hesitation by Dido and Doran. Langrishe entered on the heels of his guests, and for a moment there was a little flurry of introductions as Dido and the newcomers were made known to each other.

A spark of interest lit in de Marsac's weary eyes at the unexpected chic of Langrishe's *débutante* daughter.

"Only eighteen!" he murmured to himself as he bowed over Dido's hand. "That *demoiselle* was born a *mondaine* of twenty-five!"

Dido's glance flitted over him appraisingly.

"I hear of you, monsieur," she said, in pretty, rippling French, "that you take no interest in any woman who is not at least two thousand years old!"

"Who has been maligning me thus, mademoiselle?" asked de Marsac, in the same tongue, taking up the gauntlet with a faintly amused smile.

Pamela interrupted the light encounter.

"M. de Marsac and Doran will have to draw lots as to which is to take you in to dinner, Dido."

"I don't want to provoke an international crisis," the girl returned, with a flashing of dark eyes from one man to the other. "So I'll go in with both."

She slipped a hand lightly through an arm of each and crossed the hall to the dining-room chattering gaily.

Pamela, following on Durrant's arm, wondered if her ears could possibly have deceived her; if she had imagined that astonished: "*Tubby! You!*" which had so startled her.

In the intervals of conversation she stole questioning glances at Doran's face, only to realize, with a little sigh, that Tim was a man now, with all a man's self-control and restraint. She could read it no longer. It seemed to her searching eyes as if his mouth had rather a harder look than usual, but his soft drawl teased Mrs. Durrant about her wonderful babies and chaffed Langrishe over his beloved Barrage in a thoroughly normal manner. She noticed that he did not talk much to Dido, but that may have been because de Marsac monopolised her attention.

She flushed hotly once as she encountered Mrs. Durrant's half-quizzical, half-questioning glance, and shrugged her shoulders barely perceptibly, as if to say: "It wasn't my fault."

The little party was most successful. Langrishe, always at his best as host, shone especially to-night. Whenever Pamela's eyes met his she read pride and approbation therein. He looked from wife to daughter, from daughter back again to wife with a scarcely concealed satisfaction.

An aspiration, fervent as a prayer, rose from Pamela's heart.

"We mustn't disappoint him! Oh, we mustn't!"

she breathed. "I won't if I can possibly help it; but Dido——? What about Dido?"

She looked at the vivid little face turned provocatively up to de Marsac's, and was again conscious of the feeling of bafflement which the girl's tantalizing personality evoked.

"Elusive! Yes, that's the one word for her," she mused. "Nothing to get hold of. Nothing to appeal to. At least, if there is I haven't found it yet."

After dinner, before the men came in, Dido sat on the piano-stool playing snatches of dance-music, while the two older women talked.

"My dear, what did I tell you?" murmured Mrs. Durrant significantly.

"I can't help it," said Pamela resignedly. "Could anyone, do you think, if it came to that?"

"No! I don't suppose they could," Mrs. Durant said, with a quick glance at Dido.

Suddenly a memory came to Pamela of two deck-chairs drawn close together, two heads which nodded and whispered whenever Tim Doran and she appeared. A prick of shame smote her at the recollection. How she had resented the murmured misunderstanding: and yet, here were she and Mrs. Durrant doing exactly the same thing towards poor little Dido. If Tim and Dido had met before there was probably some quite simple explanation of the girl's silence. She flushed hotly at the thought of her own treacherous-seeming, yet actually innocent, kiss of farewell. Was it possible that matrimony changed one's point of view so utterly that it had thrust her down to the level of those two suspicious, prying women? Was she so completely "one of us" that she had already adopted the matron's censorious point of view?

With some swift intangible instinct of championship

she rose, went over to the piano, and stood for a minute beside Dido.

"Do you sing, Dido?" she asked.

The girl looked up and shook her golden mop which, carefully smoothed on top, stood out in a mass of curls about her ears.

"I make a joyful noise sometimes, but not in public. M. de Marsac sings though. He told me so at dinner. He's going to sing to-night. He knows several things without music."

"It took you to make that discovery, Dido," said Pamela, curbing a desire to put her hand on the girl's bright head. Conscious of having wronged her in her thoughts she was pathetically anxious to make amends.

"I'm rather good at making discoveries," Dido returned, with a little laugh. Then she flashed an impudent glance across at the couch where Monica Durrant sat. "I've discovered that Mrs. Durrant dislikes me, I can't think why."

"Oh, hush, Dido. I'm sure she doesn't," murmured Pamela hastily.

"I know she does, but it doesn't matter in the least."

"Tim Doran sings a little," Pamela said in a tone for general conversation.

Dido made a face.

"A little? That means that he can't sing at all, of course. Let him howl a comic song, if he likes, but for Heaven's sake don't let him attempt to tear a passion to tatters!"

There was a tang of bitterness in her tone which pierced through Pamela's newly donned panoply of championship. Before she could answer, the door opened.

"Thank Heaven, here are the men at last!" murmured Dido, playing a crashing chord.

"Poor Pamela Langrishe will have trouble with that girl yet," thought Monica Durrant as she saw de Marsac make straight for the piano.

"Let's have coffee on the terrace," suggested Langrishe.

"M. de Marsac is going to sing to us, dad," put in Dido.

"He'd like his coffee first, I'm sure," said Langrishe, in a tone that brooked no denial. "Take it out on the terrace, Hassan. Do you want a wrap, Mrs. Durrant?"

"No, thanks, it's a heavenly night," murmured Mrs. Durrant, feeling rather than seeing Dido's grimace.

Under cover of the general conversation Doran drew his chair close to Pamela's.

"You won't think me awfully rude if I go back by the early train in the morning?" he said quite normally. "It's a beastly fag, but there's an inspection some time to-morrow and I must be on the spot."

"Oh, Timsy, that's too bad!" cried Pamela, with a prick of uneasiness, her vague suspicions returning like a cloud of gnats to tease and sting. Did you know this when first you arrived?"

"Of course, Pam. I had no means of hearing since." He turned to her in surprise.

"I know, but—" she stopped. She could not tell him what she really thought, nor why such an idea should have had power to worry her.

"If you have finished your coffee, M. de Marsac," said Dido's clear voice. "Do come and sing for us now."

"If it will give you any pleasure—" de Marsac rose, and threw away his cigarette.

Dido, still smoking hers, followed him as far as the open French window, on whose step she sat down, leaning back against the green sun-shutter.

Pamela had a swift impulse to ask:

"What do you think of Dido, Tim?"

Doran's basket-chair creaked slightly as he answered: "She's awfully pretty, isn't she? So uncommon-looking. Not a bit like Mr. Langrishe, though. I suppose she takes after her mother's people."

It was the utter absence of expression in Tim's carefully controlled tones that turned Pamela's vague conjectures to certainty.

As a rule there was no hesitation about his enthusiasms. His soft drawl went up and down to the pendulum-swing of his feelings. No genuine encomium, such as his upon Dido, would have left his tone so unstirred, had there been nothing hidden behind it.

Softly out on the air stole the chords of a prelude, followed by a light tenor voice with an undeniable thrill in its upper notes.

At the first phrase Dido made a little restless movement, than nestled back against the sun-shutter in a more contented attitude. Her cigarette fell from her loosely-clasping fingers and lay forgotten on the ground, a red spark sending up a blue filmy spiral of smoke.

"Mountebank!" muttered Doran in a fierce undertone, getting up abruptly and leaning over the parapet, while the ringing tones of de Marsac's voice throbbed to silence on the darkness.

"My poor old Timsy, is it jealous you are?" thought Pamela, her heart yearning over him in wordless sympathy.

When the applause had died away, Dido's command rang clearly out:

"More, please."

De Marsac came to the French window and looked down at her.

"We mustn't bore the others."

"What do they matter? I want another song."

"My poor singing pleases you, then?"

It was well for Pamela's peace of mind that she did not hear the silky caress in de Marsac's voice.

Dido opened her great eyes full on him.

"Your poor singing pleases me very much."

"I sang to you alone."

"I knew. Sing again."

"One more, then. Your eyes hold the night in their depths, *p'tite mademoiselle*."

"Do they?" Dido laughed. "Are those the compliments you pay to your Egyptian queens, m'sieu?"

De Marsac turned abruptly and went back into the drawing-room. This girl, with the golden hair of a child, had the eyes of a sorceress. The contrast was sufficiently piquante to be disturbing.

When his second song was finished he strolled to the window again to find that Dido had vanished. A touch of discomfiture pricked him until a voice from the shadows said softly:

"Come to the other end of the terrace and I will show you my favourite view of the river."

De Marsac paused to light a cigarette as he answered.

"Already? You have a favourite view already, mademoiselle?"

"I know at once what I like and dislike," Dido answered.

"And whom?" queried de Marsac, softly.

"And whom," Dido echoed, with a curious inflection in her clear tones.

Pamela felt grateful to Mrs. Durrant for making a move almost immediately after she had seen the two figures wander to the far end of the terrace. She cast a glance at Doran, but his back was towards the retreating forms, and he was deep in a discussion with Jim Durrant about to-morrow's inspection.

"I am sorry to break up the party," Monica Durrant said. "You have given us a most delightful evening. I really think I'll have to call you Pamela after this."

"I wish you would," answered Pamela gratefully. "It seems so queer to have everyone calling me Mrs. Langrishe except my own people."

"And Mr. Doran," Mrs. Durrant reminded her.

"Ah, but he's almost one of my own," said Pamela, looking affectionately at the tall, reedy figure.

"Who is?" asked Dido, coming back reluctantly to the group, protesting that this was the best time of the day and that it was a sin to go to bed now.

"Tim Doran," answered Pamela quietly.

Doran, turning to meet her steady eyes, knew gratefully that here, at least, was a friend who would never fail him.

CHAPTER XVIII

OF WILD OATS

DORAN had gone next morning by the time Dido appeared. She looked quickly at his empty place as she kissed her father.

"I shan't kiss you Pam," she announced airily. "Women's kisses are a mockery and a delusion, so let's be honest and omit them." Then she asked casually, "Where's Tubby? Has he gone already?"

"You mean Doran?" said Langrishe. He went about ten minutes ago. He had to catch the early train."

"Why do you call him Tubby?" asked Pamela, in a voice which she tried to keep calm and non-committal.

Dido glanced under her eyelashes at her.

"He told me last night that it was his Army nickname. I love it, don't you, Dad? It's so deliciously inappropriate."

"You seem to have made friends with him very quickly, little girl," laughed Langrishe.

"Some people are easy to make friends with," Dido's tone was slighting in its carelessness.

"Too easy, perhaps," said Pamela, rather tremulously, in spite of her effort at self-control.

"Why, Pam, you're not jealous, are you?"

"Don't be absurd, Dido," cried Pamela sharply. Dido laughed.

"My little Mammy Pam is ratty this morning! Dinner-parties don't agree with you, I'm afraid."

With an effort Pamela recovered her temper.

"They're rather trying when you're not used to them."

"I thought last night went off splendidly," put in Langrishe.

"Oh, did you, Damer? I thought the evening would never end!"

"That was because you were a young and anxious hostess, my dear. You'll soon get used to it."

"I thought you were a ripping hostess, Pam," said Dido quickly. "There were no signs of the novice about last night's party."

"Do you really think so?" said Pamela, pleased in spite of herself at the girl's approval. "I'm glad it went off so well."

"M. de Marsac wants us to go out to his camp some afternoon, Dad. Couldn't you take a day off and come too?"

"Perhaps I could. We'll see. Don't wait lunch today, Pam. I may be late."

"I wish you wouldn't work so hard, Damer."

Langrishe laughed.

"Work? There's nothing like work and plenty of it." He rose. "Good-bye, little girls. Be good while I'm away."

"We're always that," smiled Dido saucily.

Pamela, thinking that the girl was quite at her best with her father, rose too, and moved to the door after Langrishe.

"I'm coming to see you off, Damer."

"Good." He slipped his arm round her when they got into the hall.

She nerved herself for a word of warning.

"Damer, do you think it will be wise to let Dido see much of M. de Marsac?" she asked tentatively.

Langrishe stiffened.

"Why not?"

"Mrs. Durrant says that—that he's not a marrying man!"

"The deuce she does! But what has that to say to it? We don't want Dido to marry him, do we?"

"Oh, no."

"Or anyone else either," said Langrishe firmly. "Bless you dear women, your heads are always full of love and match-making! Can't you let it alone, and just let the child enjoy herself! Cut out this match-making nonsense."

"Oh, I have no desire to——"

"Come, Pam, give me a kiss. I must be off." He turned up her face to his.

"I seem to see nothing of you now," she said wistfully. But Langrishe was impatient to get to his work. It was not the moment for the assurance which would have assuaged her vague hurt.

"That's better than seeing too much of me, isn't it, sweetheart?" he said, as he kissed her.

When he had gone Pamela went back to the dining-room.

"I want you to tell me something, Dido," she said, going straight to the point while her courage lasted.

Dido looked up, a spoonful of marmalade poised over her plate. The sun struck amber and orange lights from it as it dripped slowly on to her toast.

"What is it?" she asked carelessly.

"Did you ever meet Tim Doran before last night?" There was an instant's silence before Dido countered: "What on earth put such an idea into your head?"

"Never mind. It's there. Did you?"

Dido met Pamela's questioning blue eyes with a haughty, unflinching stare.

"I can't see that the fact of your having married my father gives you the right to cross-question me like this," she said in a tone that cut.

"I think it does. In any case, I can't see what objection you could possibly have to answering a simple question like that."

"No?" The monosyllable flicked insolently.

"No," answered Pamela quietly. "You either met Tim Doran before or you didn't. If you did, why make a mystery about it? If you didn't why not say so and be done with it?"

"Why not, indeed?" echoed Dido, with a sudden change of key. "Very well, then, Mammy Pam, I did meet your dear Tim Doran before, only as I had known him either as Stuart or Tubby I didn't connect him with your Tim."

"Why didn't you tell us that last night? Surely it was rather a pleasant and not at all uncommon coincidence?" pursued Pamela, only half satisfied.

"It would have meant a lot of explanation, and I wasn't in the humour for explanations last night."

"Weren't you? Why?"

"You're a horrid old inquisitor, Pam, but I suppose I'd better make a clean breast to you."

"You had."

"Well, then. I met Tubby under the rose, as it were. At an artist friend's studio where I used to go sometimes. The Grands knew nothing about it. There was no harm in it, really. We used to have lovely rags, but—I don't fancy dad would approve."

She cast a quick glance at Pamela to see how she took the confession.

"I don't suppose he would," said Pamela slowly. There was not much in the affair, after all, once the trivial heart of the mystery had been exposed.

"It's all over and done with now," the girl went on eagerly. "That's why I made Tubby promise last night to say nothing about it. There's no use in worrying dad with my little wild oats, is there?"

"Not a bit," Pamela agreed.

"I thought that you'd see eye to eye with me, old thing," cried Dido, in a tone of relief, which told her listener plainly that she had expected no such thing. "We'll still keep our conspiracy of silence, sha'n't we? Dad is a perfect dear, but he might not approve of my having had acquaintances of whom the Grands knew nothing."

"He might not, indeed. I won't say anything to him about it. But you won't go on doing that sort of thing, Dido?"

"Dear old fuss-pot! Of course I won't. I've sown my wild oats. I'm going to settle down now."

Faint misgivings still shook Pamela. Was there more than met the eye in this simple-seeming confession? Wild oats? The phrase had an elastic, a disturbing sequence of meanings. The vague fear that had haunted her last evening, suddenly took form and shape.

"Dido!" she cried uneasily. "Was there anything more than just fun between you and Tim Doran?"

But Dido was tired of being questioned. She rose, tossing her napkin on the chair next her.

"My dear Pam," she returned, in a tone of finality. "When boys and girls get together there are generally, well—passages! This subject is now closed for discussion. So are any—passages—which might have taken place between Tubby Doran and me. Now let's arrange what day we are going out to see M. de Marsac's excavations."

"It will all depend on what day your father can come," answered Pamela, rather flatly.

"I don't see that we need let it depend on that. If he can come, well and good. If he can't—surely you are chaperon enough to please even his dear old-fashioned heart?"

"I suppose so."

"The chaperon is really as extinct as the great auk," Dido went on. "I am giving in to these absurdities just at first in order to let him down gently, and because Egypt isn't exactly England. My old recollections of the East tell me that."

"I am glad they do. It saves me a lot of trouble," said Pamela, smiling. Then another mean little suspicion poked up its ugly head, ruffling her new found ease of mind.

Why was it that Tim had never mentioned having met Dido to her? He had always appeared quite unconscious at the mention of her name. Was he a consummate actor, or had that conspiracy of silence of which Dido spoke so glibly widened its scope to admit of muffling her as well as Damer? What was the meaning of it all?

She felt that she must know. To be able to trust those about her was essential to her. Once she found she could do that doubts would never find a place in her loyal heart.

She laid a detaining hand on Dido's arm as she was going out of the room.

"One moment, Dido. Forgive me for harking back to the subject again, but there's just one thing more that I must ask you."

"Oh, Mammy Pam, you *are* a bore!" the girl cried impatiently. "Ask and be done with it, and then let us bury the bones of the wretched skeleton of my past once for all!"

"It's only this. Why was it that Tim never told me

he knew you? Your name was certainly mentioned before him. Did you write and tell him not to?"

"I've never written to him since——" Dido stopped abruptly and bit her lip. Then she reddened slowly, a burning red that spread all over her white little face and neck. "The fact is," she blurted out, with a hard lightness, "he didn't know my name."

"Didn't know your name?" echoed Pamela, astounded.

"No. We all had nicknames at Binkey's. He was Tubby. I was Curly. Rose herself was Binkey, and there were Cobs and Doodle and Jackdaw. I don't believe he ever heard my real name until last night. Now, Pam, that's all. The subject is taboo from this day forth. I'm sick of it. I've turned over a new leaf. I'm going to forget all that silly rot. We all have something we want to forget. Even you!"

She looked up with an elfin malice at Pamela's perturbed face.

"Have I? I don't know what it is."

"I do." Dido laughed. "Shall I tell you?"

"If you like."

The girl hesitated for a moment, a tangle of complex emotions seething through her. Was it worth while hurting Pam or was it not? She had dealt her, Dido, some shrewder thrusts than she knew in the morning's unexpected encounter. She liked her: yes, and she had a certain respect for her, too, mingled with her contempt for her lack of sophistication. But one unconscious shaft still hung and rankled. Yes, she must deal her pointed thrust in return.

"The thing of all others that you wish to forget is that your marriage to Dad was only a marriage of convenience," she said, with sideways tilted head. "Aren't I right?"

If it were any satisfaction to her she had got her step-mother fair between the joints of her armour.

Pamela gasped as if the girl had struck her in the face, whitened, then reddened, as painfully as Dido herself had done a moment earlier.

"You—you needn't have said that," she breathed almost inaudibly, then turned and walked across the hall with slowly dragging gait and eyes that saw nothing.

Dido stood still for an instant, biting her lip in vexation. Then she ran after Pamela and thrust her arm through hers.

"Pam, forgive me! I'm an odious little beast. I shouldn't have said that. It was rotten of me."

"It was quite true," murmured Pamela tonelessly. "I do try to forget it night and day. But—how did you know?"

The girl moved restlessly.

"Oh, I don't know. I have intuitions, I suppose. But, Pam, even I wouldn't have been beast enough to say it if—if it were true now?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that it's patent to the blindest idiot that you and dad are absolutely cut out for each other, that you care most frightfully for each other——"

"Oh, gracious, do I wear my heart on my sleeve like that?" cried Pamela, with a half-hysterical laugh. "And Damer, too? I didn't think we were quite so——"

"But you are, just as bad if not worse," said Dido, incoherent in her zeal for consolation. She felt that in her pique, she might have gone a little too far. She had no desire to antagonize Pamela.

But Pamela was not vindictive. She gave herself a mental shake and voiced her thought aloud.

"After all one could never be afraid of the truth," she

said as if to herself. "If only we are true we have nothing to fear."

Dido glanced quickly at her to see if there were any personal application in her words, but Pamela's clear gaze held no mental reservation.

"What you said was quite true," she repeated, turning to face the girl. "I oughtn't to have minded it as I did, especially as—as God has been good enough to turn our marriage into something wonderfully different. I am a fortunate woman. A very fortunate woman."

"Except for your stepdaughter," murmured Dido irrepressibly.

Pamela's face irradiated in a smile.

"Ah, then, Dido," she said in her softest brogue, "maybe my stepdaughter isn't so bad, after all!"

Dido caught her breath; then put up one small hand and patted Pamela's cheek.

"On my soul, I believe it's Dad who is the lucky one," she exclaimed, with what seemed to Pamela quite unnecessary fervour.

CHAPTER XIX

OLD GODS AND NEW GODDESSES

AFTER all, the excursion to de Marsac's excavation was made with Langrishe's escort. He took an afternoon off at Pamela's special request.

A merry cavalcade, consisting of three donkeys, jingling with brass chains and gay with scarlet trappings, encouraged by the shouts and slappings of their scantily blue-clad donkey-boys, cantered through the streets of El-Armut early one December afternoon.

Dido, though not as openly enthusiastic as Pamela's enjoyed to the full the colour and movement of the town. The east, to her, was reminiscent rather than novel. It was like coming home after years of absence, in spite of the many differences between India and Egypt. She did not realize how much she had wanted it until now that she was back again.

Secretly, the scents, the sights, the sounds excited her. She loved the high houses in the winding streets, so tall that they showed but a strip of vivid blue sky between their softly-tinted fronts of blue, pink or cream banded with red; houses shuttered and balconied in carved green or brown wood; secret-looking houses that closely guarded whatever mysteries they held.

They clattered through the twisting, narrow streets, passing dark little shops whose open fronts displayed their wares; slabs of crudely-tinted calico, shelves of red tarbushes, booths of native pottery, water-jars, jugs and

bowls in cool tones of grey and green and cream. Then they sauntered through the vegetable bazaar, with its stalls full of oranges and tomatoes, strings of dried green pods, bowls of yellow millet and maize, platters of flat, green dhurra-cakes, little green onions or sticky sweet-meats, brown, white and pink, from which the vendor perpetually scattered the clustering flies, with a gay, bead-handled fly-switch.

"I think I'd like some of that stuff, Dad," exclaimed Dido as they rode past.

"I don't think you would at all," replied Damer. "Fuller's chocolates are more in your line."

The sweet-seller, noting their interest, came forward with a brownish square in his dark fingers, hastily plucked from the stall, offering it to Dido.

"Nice. Veree nice," he said enticingly.

Dido shook her head, with a smile, as they threaded their way through the varied throng: the boys with flat baskets of oranges on their heads; quail-sellers with net-bags, full of little, brown-speckled birds; blue-robed, bold-eyed peasant women with red cloths full of eggs of half-fledged pigeons; men with little wooden spindles in their hands, spinning white or brown wool as they went; camels bearing great sheaves of purple-shafted sugar-cane; snowy-turbaned sheikhs riding meek, grey donkeys.

They drew out of the bazaars to a quieter street bordered with acacias, where they passed Arab students soberly suited in *kuftáns* of blue or fawn silk over white under-robés, talking to each other with grave gestures, evidently comparing notes on their studies as they walked.

The way led onwards through a palm-grove, from which a flock of pigeons rose as they entered, with a flurry of silver and gold-brown wings and a flash of pearly breasts as they turned in the sunlight.

"I'd like to live in a palm-grove," declared Dido, looking like a white elf, her father fondly thought, as he answered:

"You'd soon get tired of it, little girl."

She shook her head..

"I don't think so."

Three is a proverbially awkward number for an excursion. Two keep each other company while one has inevitably to ride alone. For the first part of the way Pamela found herself the solitary, but as they cantered out of the palm-grove's shade into a dusty road which lay bare and blinding to the sun, Langrishe pressed forward to join her.

She looked round with a smile of pleasure.

"This is indeed a land of sudden contrasts," Pamela said. "I'm enjoying every minute of it, Damer."

"That's good. We've come through life to death now," returned Langrishe pointing with his stick to where the road wound forlornly through a deserted burial-ground.

Broken mud-brick tombs crumbled apart on raised mounds. Through the light brown rubble bones protruded whitely; here a gleaming skull, there a thigh-bone, farther on the pale curve of a rib.

Yellow Pariah dogs prowled through this desolate place of the forgotten dead, snarling viciously from behind the tumbled heaps.

Ali, Pamela's donkey-boy, picked up a clod and flung it at one, bolder than the rest, who sprang towards them, baring vicious teeth. It yelped before it was touched and slunk snarling back to safety.

"They're cowardly savages," said Langrishe. "The Arabs say: '*He is like a dog on the mound,*' of anyone who has fallen very low. Isn't that so, Ali?"

Already, Langrishe had picked up a good deal of Arabic. He had the useful "knack," as he called it himself, of

acquiring languages easily. Ali bared teeth as white as the dog's in answer.

Dido pressed forward.

"This is a cheery spot!" she exclaimed. "Have we much farther to go?"

Langrishe pointed to a palm-girt mud village beyond which the desert stretched, tawny and wrinkled as a lion's skin, to the foot of the Libyan Hills.

"About two miles more, my donkey-boy, Ibrahim, tells me. By gad, I'll be glad of a long drink after this." Langrishe mopped his forehead.

"You're not hot, Dad, are you? I'm simply soaking in this delicious sunshine as a sponge soaks up water," cried Dido. "I've come to the conclusion that I never really lived in England. I am going to live now, though," she added in a tone compact of satisfaction, determination, and excited anticipation. "So that's that!"

"Is it, indeed?" said Langrishe, with his amused smile. "And what about you, Pam, my dear?"

"I'm enjoying every minute of it," she repeated.

Nevertheless, no one was really regretful when de Marsac's camp came in sight—a cluster of cream tents against the biscuit-coloured lower hill-slopes.

De Marsac himself, slim and dark in immaculate white, came forward across the sand to meet them. He dismounted Dido as Langrishe helped Pamela to alight.

"A white butterfly," he murmured at the girl's airy-light movement.

Dido frowned until her eyebrows nearly met over her great brown eyes, giving her an odd resemblance to her father.

"M. de Marsac, do you know any American?"

"American?" he echoed, amused and puzzled.

"Compliments cut no ice with me, as they say in the States," she returned curtly.

"But, mademoiselle——"

"But, monsieur," she protested, tapping her donkey-switch impatiently against her little white shoe. "If you and I are to be friends, please remember that I have no use for that sort of piffle."

"Piffle?" murmured de Marsac. "Is that American, too?"

"No, it's good—or rather bad—English," said Dido, laughing suddenly.

"Why not speak the French that you so—but your voice truly sounds like music in my tongue, mademoiselle. It is no compliment, I assure you!" de Marsac protested.

"No?"

"Vraiment non." He turned to talk to his other guests.

"You can enjoy as much solitude as you like here, de Marsac," Langrishe said, looking round at the camp with its handful of tents, so insignificant an item against the great fawn and umber slopes that rose behind it.

Far away stretched the Nile valley—a blur of green in every tone, from the darkness of date-palms to the grey of olives, El-Armut clustered on its verge, a faintly-tinted huddle of houses topped by bubble-like domes and dominated by the delicate towers of innumerable minarets. Between camp and town stretched the beginning of the desert, a sweep of tawny sand with lavender hollows and purple-grey shadows.

Dido caught her breath as she looked.

"I want to lie naked in that sand and feel the sun beat on my bare body," she thought, with a fierceness of desire that astonished even her unconventional, egoistic self. She cast a glance across at de Marsac, who was talking

to her father. "I wonder if he'd understand, or is he too blasé, too sophisticated?"

"I get my fill of solitude sometimes," the Frenchman was saying. "Not during the day. Then I am busy. I have enough to do to occupy brain and body. But when night falls and one can work no more—" He made an expressive gesture which at once unlocked the fount of Langrishe's hospitality.

"You must come in to us whenever you feel inclined. Don't wait for an invitation. We could have a rubber of bridge, or a little music. Marshall often drops in, and young Welland. Do come."

"May I really?" He glanced towards Pamela.

"Of course," she said at once, flushing a little. "We shall be charmed to see you."

"You do not realize how kind you are to give such an invitation, madame," de Marsac said, with a flash of gratitude which went straight to Pamela's warm heart. "It is often lonely here."

"Indeed it must be. You will be sure to come?"

Dido listened for his answer.

"Does the thirsting man refuse a draught of cool well water?" he asked.

The girl stirred restlessly. The language of compliment again. Was there anything real under the fine, conventional polish? The other night she thought that there might have been. To-day—she turned away sharply to find him at her side.

"Would it please you if I came?" he asked, in a tone for her ear alone.

Sure of his interest at least, she took an impish delight in thwarting him.

She cast down her eyes and spoke in a school-girl fashion.

"What pleases my parents must surely please me," she said, with mock demureness.

He turned abruptly. She hoped that she heard the roll and hiss of a stifled "Sacr-r-ré!" as he left her.

A tall Arab in a peach-coloured *kuftán* brought a tray of cool drinks.

"Would you rather sit in the tent or out here?" de Marsac asked. "When you are sufficiently rested I will show you the excavations, if you care to see them, and then we shall have tea."

"In the tent," said Pamela, whose head ached a little from the glare of the sun.

"Out here," said Dido at the same moment.

De Marsac smiled.

"Perhaps you will do both. See, the front of my dining-tent is looped back. Mrs. Langrishe will sit inside in the shade, while you, mademoiselle, can stay out here on a rug."

"No rug for me," Dido declared. "I want to sit on the sand; the hot, stinging sand."

De Marsac led the way to his square open tent, lined inside with Bedouin tenting; gods and goddesses in brilliant red, blue, green and black boldly *appliquéd* on a cream background.

For furniture it had a rough, square table, a cane lounge-chair, a baize-topped folding table, a couple of wooden chairs and some boxes; a regular working-place; no sybaritic retreat such as Dido had vaguely visioned.

Pamela sank into the lounge chair, with its blue cotton-covered cushions, with a sense of relief.

It was pleasant to rest there in the shade and sip her cool drink, and feel that she need not talk or entertain anyone for the moment. She had had to readjust her whole conception of her relations with Dido, and her

feelings towards the girl were still unsettled. She liked her even while she condemned her; she wanted to win her, though she was, as yet, wary of making advances; but above and beneath and throughout all her chaotic sensations was the uneasy certainty that Dido was the girl who had hurt Tim Doran so badly. For that, she had the unacknowledged feeling that it might be no harm at all if M. de Marsac gave her a lesson. To be hoist with her own petard might be a very salutary experience for Miss Dido Langrishe.

Pamela looked at her now as she sat in the sun outside the tent, holding out little hands whose whiteness its fiercest rays had no power to brown. She had flung aside her Panama hat, with its yellow ribbon, and her hair stood out about her queer, vivid little face like a nimbus of coppery gold. Her amber-striped linen frock was the last word in smartness. She seemed all compact of white and gold.

"Dido, you'll get sunstroke," Pamela called out in warning.

"Not I. The sun is Ré, my great lover. He won't harm me." She shook her head, and burying her hands in the sand, poured shining streams of it as in libation to the mighty Sun-god.

"Ré is sometimes fierce in his caresses, mademoiselle," said de Marsac, who had settled himself on the sand near the opening of the tent, against whose pole he leaned.

"I don't mind that," Dido murmured.

"No?" queried de Marsac. Then he spoke as if on an irresistible impulse. "Mademoiselle, when first we met I thought you *mondaine*. Now——"

Dido turned over on the sand, propped her chin on her hands and regarded him with interest.

"Now?" she questioned suggestively.

"Now I begin to think you are——" he hesitated.

Dido caught him up with a strange little smile. "Barbarian? Is that it, monsieur?"

"Perhaps. No. I don't know."

"Primitive, then?" She half buried one hand in the sand.

"Ah, yes, perhaps. Primitive." With a sudden rough gesture he put his hand hard over the one which lay so temptingly near him.

Flushing suddenly, Dido pulled it away and sprang to her feet.

"No!" she whispered, breathing hard as if she had been running. "No. No. No!"

He rose, too. For a moment the tent-flap hid them from the two within. He looked at her with nostrils dilated to a sudden whiteness. "Mademoiselle," he murmured with a fierceness that matched her own. "I do not think that it will ever be possible for you and me to be friends."

"No?" queried Dido, with her bell-like laugh; a difficult effort.

"Mon dieu, non!"

He turned abruptly and went into the tent, the echo of that elfin laughter still ringing in his ears. He could not know that her heart was leaping madly, and that a murmured "Thank God!" followed his emphatic denial.

A move was made to see the explorations.

The excavation had not gone very far as yet. A flight of steps leading to a pillared pavement was all that had been uncovered so far. De Marsac thought that it had belonged to a temple which had been badly damaged by an earthquake before the inexorable desert sand had hidden it for twenty centuries.

Langrishe and Pamela examined it all with interest,

but to Dido the stones and steps were meaningless, if not boring, after the passionate little interlude, so startling in its unexpectedness.

Her heart still pounded. She wondered what de Marsac was feeling as he explained the details of the excavation in his careful English, as he fingered his clipped moustache, or gave directions to the Arabs. Every gesture, every look of his seemed to have assumed a sudden significance for Dido. It was as if this—this—she could not put it into words, but as if this—something—were the secret meaning which Egypt had for her.

But she was not going to give in to it tamely. She would not flutter like a caged bird. She would fight it. It should prove that it was stronger than she. It must master her inevitably before she surrendered to its power.

What had happened to her that a mere flirtation, lightly embarked on, lightly regarded, should have turned all at once into this wild elemental feeling? She did not know.

As for de Marsac, the primitive instinct of the hunter had arisen at Dido's first touch of resistance. He had thought that it might be pleasant to have a little affair with the demoiselle so piquante in her contrast of youth and sophistication. She knew the game, too, he had reflected with satisfaction. She could play with fire as well as he. There was no fear that either would get their fingers burned. And now, lo, a shaft of flame stood between them; real flame, scorching, searing flame that might shrivel them in its fire! On the other side stood Dido, elusive, tantalizing, small and fine as a fairy, skilled as a witch in her lures. Almost he felt if he must risk the flame to get her; almost, but not quite, as yet.

Meanwhile he set himself out to win the good graces of the father and *beile-mère*. He much preferred the French phrase to the cold English expression. So well

did he succeed that Pamela, for the moment, forgot Mrs. Durrant's warning, forget her own desire for the chastening of Dido in the charm of de Marsac's personality.

He made her pour out tea for them all, and when she and Langrishe were once more safely ensconced within the tent he took out a dish of rough native pottery filled with little loose-skinned oranges to Dido on the sand outside.

"You like these?" he said tentatively.

She looked up.

"I adore them. But how did you know?"

"Already I know some of your likes and dislikes," he laughed softly. "It is the *primitif* in me which responds——"

"You are not primitive," she interrupted quickly. "You are the last word in modernity, you and your civilization!"

"Civilization is a mere veneer, mademoiselle. The layer may be thick or thin according to temperament and circumstance, but believe me, it is purely superficial."

"Is it?"

"Truly. Primitive man does not dwell very far below the surface. He is always ready to leap out at the touch of the elemental."

"What do you mean by the elemental?"

"Any of the great forces of life, hunger, self-preservation, love."

"I like the order you put them in," said Dido, with a little scornful laugh.

"Is it not written in the Scriptures, mademoiselle, that the first shall be last and the last first—in certain circumstances?"

Dido, the quick-tongued, the ready-witted, was silenced for once. She stripped the loose skin from the little

Yussuf Effendi orange and threw it on the sand, where it lay like an upturned cup of fire.

De Marsac watched her, also in silence. Somehow he felt that he had scored in this swift, secret battle which had arisen between them.

He went back to the others, well content to let primitive man be hidden once more beneath the social veneer.

At parting, Langrishe reminded him of his invitation.

"I meant it, de Marsac," he assured him hospitably. "It was no *façon de parler*, as you'd say yourself."

"I know. It will give me great pleasure." He broke off to go and mount Dido, but she had sprung to her saddle without his help by the time he had reached her donkey's side.

He put his hand on the rein and looked full at her.

"Am I to come, mademoiselle?"

"What is it to me, monsieur?"

"That is not polite, mademoiselle."

"Surely you don't expect me to pay you compliments, M. de Marsac?" Dido looked away from him as she gathered up her reins in her white-gloved hand.

"When I do you will pay them. Of that rest assured, mademoiselle," he said lightly.

She shot a glance of unutterable fury at him.

"Oh!" she breathed. Words once more failed her.

She switched her donkey's grey, clipped flank and rode off, feeling angry with him, with herself, with her whole world. Underneath her rage was the unpleasant and, to Dido, wholly novel sensation of extreme youth and inexperience. For the first time in her short life, she had met her match.

She galloped on well ahead of the others, who followed in more sober fashion.

De Marsac, bare-headed, watched them go, a little pleased smile on his lips.

"She runs away," he murmured to himself. "Eh bien, it is for me to follow—at my leisure!"

In the zest of the encounter he, too, had forgotten how young she was.

Remembering it now, his dark brows drew together in a frown, and his lips, losing their laughter, tightened again to their old wariness.

"A thousand pities that she is not married," he mused. "It complicates matters to have her *jeune fille*."

CHAPTER XX

DIDO PLAYS FAIR

ON the return to El-Armut it was Pamela and Langrishe who jogged along side by side, each well content with the other, while Dido cantered far ahead, spurred by this new, troubling emotion which had so suddenly seized her.

Talk was desultory; little, happy fragments punctuated by satisfied silences.

"I think you were a bit prejudiced against de Marsac," said Langrishe at last.

"I'm afraid I was. I'm not now, though. He really is charming. Did you see that snapshot of the picnic at Fontainebleau he showed me? I thought his sister had quite a look of Kitty. Not really like, you know, but just a look."

"Probably. Likenesses are queer things. Look here, Pam." He turned to her suddenly. "I won't have any more talk about Dido's marrying. She's far too young to think of such a thing yet. I want her to have a good time, and to see something of men and the world before she chooses. There's time enough yet. I won't have ideas put into her head."

Pamela smiled.

"Do you really think that anyone ever puts ideas about love and marriage into a girl's head. She's born with them, dear man."

"Is she? Well, no need to foster them, then."

"After all, it's the most important thing that can happen to a woman," Pamela went on.

"Is it? Well, perhaps it is."

"Indeed it is. It means her whole life. Damer—" She hesitated, and then went on. "Have you ever thought of the awful risks you and I took?"

"Were they awful? It didn't seem to me as if I were risking much in asking you to marry me."

"Didn't it?" Pamela blushed brightly, and shot him a grateful glance. "But you were, all the same. So was I. Our marriage might have turned out differently."

"But it didn't, sweetheart, so what's the use of worrying?"

"I'm not worrying, but—are you really satisfied, Damer? I've often wanted to ask you."

"Then you might have spared yourself the trouble." He had no idea how hungrily she longed for the reassurance in words of what she really knew in her heart. Then something a little wistful in her look touched him. "Look here, little girl, I don't need to say these things every time, do I? Don't you know that you've made me happier than I had any mortal right to expect? Don't you know quite well what you mean to me? Haven't I shown you? Haven't I, Pam?" His voice caressed her with reference to their deeper moments of joy.

She turned a happy, moved face to him.

"Yes. Yes, dear one, but you don't realize—sometimes, in spite of it all, I feel as if I must hear it in words."

"Words?" He made a little, contemptuous sound. "What do words matter between you and me?"

"Oh, they don't—they don't!" she cried joyously. Her heart sang. All was well with the world in this land of light and colour, of wonder and mystery, of radiance such as now filled the western sky.

They had left behind the deserted graveyard and the

beaten mud paths of the palm grove, and entered the town once more.

"I must tell Dido not to get so far ahead. It's better for us to keep together," said Langrishe, pressing forward.

Dido had slackened speed. Her reins fell loosely on the donkey's neck. He picked his own way through the multi-coloured crowd, followed by the donkey-boy. As they went through the street of high houses, suddenly from one—tall, secret-looking, and shuttered closely with brown *mushrabiyyeh* lattices—came the sound of a voice rising and falling to the monotonous throb of a tambourine, which beat like a pulse, under the bare hand of the player. All at once the voice rose with a shrill poignance to a height which seemed almost impossible, so thin, so piercing was it, before it died away with the thrill and turn beloved of the Egyptian singer.

Dido stiffened to attention at the sound, stirred to a thrill of expectancy. Something of the wild passion of the song found an uneasy echo within her. For an incredible moment she felt as if it were upon her heart that the bare hand of the tambourine-player was beating.

"Hallo, Dido, were you running away from us?"

She turned a white little face towards her father's smiling brown one.

"You can judge by my pace," she answered, with an effort at lightness. "It wasn't exactly that of a runaway."

"Not exactly. You're looking a bit white, little girl. Hope you haven't got a touch of the sun?"

"Oh, no!" Dido cried impatiently. "I'm always white. Even this sun won't brown me."

Letters lay on the table in the hall as they entered, a little tired, a little flat after the excitement of the afternoon.

One for Pamela was addressed in a large, careless hand-writing, in which the "m's" and "n's" and "u's" were all formed alike.

She took it up and looked it over in the wondering way in which people generally inspect an unfamiliar writing. It bore the Cairo postmark.

"Who on earth can be writing to me from Cairo?" she said. "I don't know anyone there."

"Can't you open it and see?" suggested Dido tartly, annoyed by her indecision.

"Quite an idea," smiled Pamela, "though somehow I feel as if it weren't altogether a nice letter."

"Do you really believe in intuitions like that, Pam?"

"Indeed I do. I think we'd get on far better if we paid more attention to them, instead of trying to stifle or ignore them as we do." She tore open the envelope, and took out the folded sheet, looking up quickly when she saw the signature, "Heloise Waring."

She bit back an exclamation as she read it, then handed the letter to Langrishe.

"It's from Mrs. Waring. She says she's going up to Luxor after Christmas. She wants to know when we can have her."

"Ah, then your intuition was at fault this time, Pam," said Langrishe, not displeased at this prick to the bubble of his wife's superstition, as he dubbed it.

Dido, after a glance at Pamela's face, chuckled to herself as she went upstairs to her own room, a letter from Doran crumpled in her hand. Her father's voice followed her.

"Ask her to come to us for Christmas, Pam. Christmas is a lonely time to be away from one's home."

"She must be used to it," murmured Pamela rebelliously.

"We might ask Doran down to stay, too," went on

Langrishe, alight with the fire of hospitality. "We've room enough, haven't we?"

"Oh, quite," said Pamela flatly.

"And we'll have de Marsac in to dine, and as many of the Barrage fellows as we can. I've ordered a turkey already. You can show Mahmud how to do the plum-pudding and mince-pies, can't you?"

"Plum-pudding and mince-pies in this weather! It does sound incongruous!"

"We'll have a real home Christmas. Write down to Cairo for crackers and things, Pam." Langrishe exhaled a boyish delight as he made his plans, which made Pamela feel that she would do anything in the world to further them.

"I'll put Mrs. Waring in the room looking over the river. Tim can have that small one at the back. Where shall I write for the crackers?"

"Ask Mrs. Durrant. We'll have her, and Durrant, too, and the Weirs and Granthams, if they can come."

"Damer, you'll have to build a dining-room if you go on at this rate!"

"Never mind. Where there's heart-room there's house-room, and this will be my first Christmas in my own home for I don't know how many years."

"Ah, my dear!" Pamela melted suddenly, though the thought of Mrs. Waring's coming lay on her heart like a physical weight.

The idea of visitors was not altogether unwelcome to Dido, for she felt that the presence of another woman in the house would keep Pamela's attention off her own affairs, for the moment. She was beginning to have a wholesome respect for her stepmother's powers of perception, and was still puzzled as to how she had made the discovery of her previous knowledge of Doran.

Dido flattered herself that she had carried it off very well. Tubby had played up like a brick, too, though she half wished he hadn't rushed off so early the next morning. It seemed to give the show away, rather. What in the world was he writing to her about now? She wished he wouldn't.

She smoothed out the crumpled envelope, and opened it. It was brief and to the point.

"DEAR CURLY," Tim's note ran:

"What do you want me to do? Am I to come in and out as usual, or would you rather I stayed away? Just let me know.

"Yours,
"TUBBY."

"Nothing very impassioned about that!" breathed Dido, with a sigh of satisfaction.

She tossed her hat on the bed, pulled the amber ribbon from her hair, and ran her fingers through it. Her head was hot, but she did not attribute it to the sun.

Acting on impulse, she sat down at the little writing table which Pamela had provided for her, and dashed off an answer to Doran's letter.

"DEAR TUBBY,

"Come or stay away, just as you like. Pam knows that we have met before. I don't know how she found out, unless you told her. If you stay away, perhaps it may mean complications, and we can't afford that. But do as you think best.

"Yours,
"CURLY."

"Idiotic name!" she said viciously, closing the envelope with a thump of her small, fine hand. "Idiotic time altogether! I can't imagine how we were such young asses! Well, it's over and done with now, thank goodness. This

is the last of it. I must warn Tubby never to call me Curly again. All that is dead and buried. The past is past."

Suddenly, with that irrelevance with which memory sometimes flicks aside a corner of her veil to show one a forgotten picture, Dido saw a class-room full of girls, a mistress standing near a blackboard with a piece of chalk in her hand, and a shaft of sunlight falling through a window upon the clear, white words which she had just written :

"The past can never die; what has been will be again and the things a man has once suffered, he must still endure!"

It had been the theme for their weekly essay, and Dido remembered the grimace she had made at sight of it. She had thought the words erased from her mind as quickly as they had been from the blackboard, and lo, now they leaped out of the past to confront her with their pessimistic menace!

She knew a moment's vague uneasiness.

"I'm getting as bad as Pam, with her intuitions," she thought, shrugging her disquietude away. "Poor old Mammy Pam, what a transparent countenance she has! Now, how am I to get this posted without her knowing it? I don't want to arouse her suspicions any more than I need." She paused, frowning, envelope in hand. "Of course she knows Tubby's writing. She'll wonder at the correspondence. Oh, damn!"

Suddenly her face changed. Light flashed. She opened her door, and ran along the corridor to Pamela's room, beating a light tattoo on the door with insistent fingers.

"Come in," called Pamela

Dido entered to find her stepmother, wrapped in a deep

blue silk kimono, seated by the open window, looking out across the river to the rosy Arabian Hills, with their amber clefts and amethyst shadows.

She looked round with a smile at the girl's entrance. Dido thought that her gown was no bluer than her eyes, and the cherry-blossom embroidered on it no whiter than her neck and arms.

"I'm lazy, Dido. I haven't changed yet," she said, stretching out her arms in a luxurious languor.

"Nor I," answered Dido, seating herself on the ledge of the French window that opened on the loggia without. "Look here, Pam, I've just had a line from Tubby Doran."

"Oh! What did he say?" asked Pamela, with quickened interest.

Dido faced her with obvious frankness, her hands clasped round her knees.

"He just wrote to know what I wanted him to do. Whether I'd rather he came or stayed away. Awfully decent of the old thing, wasn't it?"

"Dido, what can it matter to you whether he comes or goes, if there was nothing between you?" Pamela countered with an unexpected swiftness.

Dido blinked and looked away.

"As to that, I—I thought you gathered that there had been—well—passages between us," she answered airily.

"Did you hurt him, Dido?" the accusing voice went on "I have a reason for asking."

Dido moved restlessly, then broke out:

"If a man cares for a girl, and—and she doesn't care for him, can she help hurting him?"

Pamela, eager to be just, pondered this for a moment. Then she admitted slowly:

"No. I don't suppose she can. Poor Tim! But perhaps I would rather say poor Dido!"

"Why poor Dido?" asked the girl quickly.

"Because you couldn't care for him. He's worth caring for, Dido."

"Is he? Well, perhaps. Anyhow, the whole thing is over and done with, and I've written to tell him to come or stay away, just as he likes." She rose. "Can I put this letter with yours to be posted?"

Pamela got up, too.

"Certainly. Leave it on my dressing-table there, and I'll see that it goes." She came a step forward and put her hands on Dido's shoulders. "Dido, dear, it was good of you to tell me this. I—I can't say how much I appreciate it. I want to be friends with you. Don't you know that? I want you to feel that you can trust me."

"Would I have told you this about Tubby and me if I didn't?"

"No, and that's why I am so pleased."

"It takes very little to please you, Mammy Pam," cried Dido, making a queer little grimace.

She put up her hands to the two on her shoulders, gave them a quick squeeze, and drew away.

"Oh, no, it doesn't," answered Pamela smiling. "You can't call trust and truth very little, Dido."

"No?" said Dido, biting her lips, as she ran out of the room, having left her letter behind her.

CHAPTER XXI

FIRELIGHT

DORAN came to El-Armut only once before the Christmas party. He dropped in late one afternoon between trains, just as the early dusk was falling with true Eastern swiftness, to find Pamela sitting by a small wood fire in the dining-room.

"Hallo! Pam, all alone? This is cosy!" he cried cheerily. "Has your family deserted you?"

"Not altogether," answered Pamela, feeling a tinge of awkwardness in the unexpected encounter. "Dido has gone with Mrs. Durrant to the Barrage quarters to play tennis, but I am expecting Damer back at any moment for tea."

"Good luck my finding you by yourself for a minute, Pam," he said, sinking into a chair near her. "You're such a popular person these days that I never can get a word with you."

"Ah, nonsense, Timsy! It comes well from you to say that!" Pamela looked at him and away again wondering if he had anything special to say to her. It was for him to make advances though. She was not going to force anyone's confidences. "Sure, I'm always talking to you?"

"I haven't seen you since the night of your dinner-party," he began.

"You haven't been in!"

"No more I have. Well, Pam, I just ran down between trains to-day to accept your Christmas invitation in person."

"Good! I was hoping you would."

"Were you?" His tone was a little wistful, she thought.

"I was indeed. I'll have you to stand buffer between me and Mrs. Waring——"

"Good God, is that woman coming here, too? I'll retract my——"

"Oh, no you won't. You'll have to amuse me while Damer's looking after her."

"Very well. That's a bargain. You've promised to be nice to me, remember."

"Aren't I always nice to you, Timsy?" cried Pamela, her spirits lightening at his normality.

"Indeed you are, God bless you," Doran stopped and looked at her with genuine affection.

There was still something to be said between them, but he did not quite know how to put it into words. Perhaps Pamela saw this, for she broached the difficult subject herself with a quiet ordinariness for which he was duly grateful.

"Tim, Dido has admitted to me that you and she knew each other in England before you met here the other night."

"We did. But how on earth did you find out, Pam?"

"I overhead her calling you 'Tubby' when you went into the drawing-room. I wasn't listening, Tim," she added, with a sudden flush. "I—I couldn't help hearing."

"You needn't tell me that," Doran returned with a consoling warmth. "Did—did she tell you how we met?"

"She did. She said it was at an artist friend's, and that you all called each other by nicknames. I suppose it was all right, Tim?"

"Oh, quite respectable, if you mean that. The girl, Rose Bladen—Binky—was as mad as a hatter, and as

wild as a hare, but absolutely straight. We ragged a lot. You know the way youngsters fool—but perhaps you don't." He broke off and looked at her with anxious eyes, as if pleading for understanding. "One goes a bit mad at times. There's a May madness, and a June madness, and a moon madness—oh, what rot I'm talking!"

"No, you're not. Go on."

"There's nothing more to say, really."

Silence fell for a moment. Then Pamela spoke rather shyly.

"Tim, don't think it's vulgar curiosity on my part——"

"I wouldn't think anything you asked me vulgar curiosity, Pam."

"Then, Timsy, dear, *was* Dido the girl?"

For a moment he had the impulse to fence foolishly with a—"What girl?" but he changed his mind and nodded: "She was."

"And you still care?"

"I still care."

"Will it hurt you to go on seeing her?"

"Twould hurt me more not to see her."

"My poor boy!" Pamela's tone trembled to an exquisite sympathy as she put her hand gently on his knee.

It was at this moment that Langrishe entered. The room was dark save for the splutter of blue and saffron flames from the fire, but there was light enough for him to see that Pamela was sitting there with her hand on some man's knee.

She turned at his entrance, and took her hand quietly away. A log charred and fell, sending up a tongue of flame. By its light he saw that her eyes were wet.

"It's Tim, Damer," she said. "We've been talking so hard that I forgot to ring for lights."

"Let me," said Doran rising. "I came down to an-

swer my Christmas invitation in person, Mr. Langrishe."

"Good. Hope you're coming." Langrishe's tone was not quite so cordial as usual. He had been looking forward to *tête-à-tête* tea with Pamela, and felt disappointed at the presence of a third person.

"Indeed, I am," answered Doran, seeing no flaw. "Tisn't likely I'd refuse a jolly invitation like that. It's awfully good of you to ask me. It will be quite like home. You're having a house-party, Pam tells me."

"Only Mrs. Waring and yourself," Langrishe rejoined. "A family-party practically. Pam's old friend and mine."

Pamela tried to warm to the thought, but could not. As the time approached she felt her distaste at the idea of Mrs. Waring's coming wax rather than wane.

Talk flowed on general subjects until after tea, when Doran rose to take his leave.

Langrishe went out into the hall to see him off, his little flicker of ill-humour completely vanished.

Pamela was leaning against the chimney-piece when he returned, poking a log with the toe of her shoe.

Langrishe came up to her and put his arm round her.

"I felt almost murderous when I came in just now and found Doran here!"

"Damer! How dreadful! Poor Tim! Why?" Pamela leaned back against him, and put one hand to his face.

"I'd been looking forward to having tea alone with you for once."

She made a little crooning sound.

"My dear one! But he didn't stay long, anyhow."

"No. He had that much grace."

Pamela laughed happily. It was like an hour from the

honeymoon miraculously vouchsafed, with the deeper understanding of the passing days added.

"Pam! What was he saying that made you cry?"

"Made me cry?" Pamela moved in his arms to glance up at him. "But he didn't, Damer. He was telling me something that made me a little unhappy."

"Your eyes were wet when I came in."

"Oh, that?" she cried relieved. "He—"

"About himself, eh?"

"About himself. Yes."

"A love affair?" Langrishe's staccato questions pattered like hail.

"Well, it was," Pamela admitted reluctantly.

"An unlucky one?"

"You might call it so."

"Misplaced affection, so to speak?"

"I suppose so. Don't ask me any more, dearest. It's poor old Tim's business, not ours."

"Well, don't worry your tender heart about it. Bless you, Pam, young men fall in and out of love half a dozen times before the real thing comes."

"Do they? Did you, Damer?"

"I expect I did. I've quite forgotten."

"Since when?" she asked, very low, leaning against him with a sense of joy in his strength and size.

"Since—well, since I married you, anyhow."

"In spite of its being a marriage of convenience?"

She stirred in his arms, and put her face up to his.

"I hate to have you call it that, Pam. It wasn't, really."

"I'm afraid it was, on the face of it, my dearest."

"It was not," exclaimed Langrishe quite hotly. "When I made up my mind to marry again, you were the one and only person I thought of."

"Was I? How dear of you to tell me so! And you were the one and only person I'd have married under those conditions."

"Why?" asked Langrishe, rather breathlessly.

"Because I always liked the shape of your nose," answered Pamela, with a happy laugh.

Langrishe's arms went quickly round her, crushing her to him.

"My sweetheart!" he murmured as he loosed her. "It's all right now, isn't it?"

"All right, indeed," she was saying, when the door opened suddenly to admit Dido and what seemed like an avalanche of young men.

The two moved apart quickly. Dido came forward with her train, which resolved itself into two tall youths.

"I've brought Mr. Welland and Mr. Darby back to dinner, Pam. I've promised to teach them some of the new dances. You don't mind, do you?"

"You monkey, small use 'twould be if I did!" thought Pamela, while aloud she gave courteous greeting to the unexpected guests. "You're very welcome, both of you."

"I knew that if you had enough for Dad you'd have at least enough for two more," Dido continued saucily.

"The deuce you did!" murmured her father. "However, we are always ready for an extra guest or two. Pamela is full of resource." He looked at his wife proudly.

"Didn't I live in Ireland all my life?" she answered. "Sure, you know what that means."

"What does it mean, Mrs. Langrishe?" asked Welland, a fair, imperturbable youth.

"It means that you never think you've half enough unless you've got twice too much," said Pamela. "Dido, we'd better change now, and let the men have a smoke."

As they went upstairs Dido asked casually:

"Any adventures while I was out?"

"None," Pamela answered; then, recollecting, continued: "Oh, I forgot. We had a flying visit from Tim Doran."

In spite of herself, her tone hardened a little. She found it difficult to forgive Dido's treatment of her old playmate. She could not help feeling that the girl was in some measure to blame, that she must have played fast and loose with him in those past reckless days.

Dido stopped on the landing outside her room.

"What did he want?"

"He came to answer the Christmas invitation in person."

"Is he coming?"

"He is. Don't—don't torment him any more than you can help, Dido."

"I'm sure I don't want to torment him," cried Dido impatiently. "On the other hand, I don't want to raise false hopes in him."

"Need they be always false?" ventured Pamela incoherently. "I—I don't mean exactly now, but some day—later on—when he—when you——"

"When he—when I—grow old and grey, perhaps," Dido mocked. "Don't try your hand at match-making, Mammy Pam. You'll only burn your fingers if you do."

Pamela turned away, discomfited, annoyed with herself for her sentimental disregard of her husband's wishes. She had broken a lance for Tim, who was well able to fight his own battles, and had done no good for his cause with Dido.

Damer was quite right. She should not have interfered. She ought to have remembered all the warning adages relative to minding one's own business. She went into her room and looked across the river to where the

dim hills showed as a blur against the dark night sky. She went out on to the loggia. Shafts of light streamed across the terrace in golden bars from the drawing-room windows beneath.

A black shadow barred the radiance nearest her, and a scent of cigarette-smoke floated upwards. One of the men stood below. A little owl hooted from the palm-trees at the end of the terrace—*hou-hou, hou-hou!* A chilly wind blew suddenly up the river, ruffling its darkness to silver streaks here and there.

Pamela shivered slightly, and stepped back into the warmth and light of her own room, to find that Damer had already come up.

"I left Dido downstairs, entertaining those youngsters," he said. "I want a tub before I dress."

"She must have changed like a flash of lightning," exclaimed Pamela, wondering how long she had stood looking at the river.

"Ah, she doesn't let the grass grow under her feet," said Langrishe fondly.

"Meaning, I suppose that I do?"

"In my young days I was taught that comparisons were odious," Langrishe rebuked her, smiling. "You didn't mind her asking those boys back to dinner?"

"Not a bit. Did you?"

"Oh, the more the merrier," Langrishe returned.

Pamela had an intuition that he felt there was safety in numbers. He did not want to lose his little girl yet. She hurried into her frock, and went downstairs to tell Hassan to lay two more places.

CHAPTER XXII

THE COMING OF THE WHITE CLOUD

As Christmas drew nearer, Pamela's spirits fluctuated like a pendulum.

She fought with all her might against the strange sense of depression which the mere thought of Mrs. Waring's coming induced, and wondered what the reality would be like.

She told herself that it would be very churlish of her to grudge Damer the pleasure of his old friend's visit, especially when he made his home open house to Tim Doran. Yet, even while she argued with herself, she knew perfectly well that jealousy of any sort had nothing to do with their feeling. Damer might have asked twenty friends to stay, and she would have welcomed them all with open arms, if—and it was a potent conjunction—Heloise Waring had not been among the number!

It was a personal antagonism, swift and unalterable as that which had sprung to birth between Doran and de Marsac.

True to the coincidences that linked them inimically, de Marsac, like Doran, paid only one visit to the house by the river-bank before Christmas.

On this occasion he, unlike his rival, had found it disappointingly empty. The ladies had gone to play tennis at Mrs. Durrant's, a smiling Hassan informed him.

That was the first rasp to his smooth assurance. He had visioned a piquante, provocative Dido, ready to re-

spond to the charm he meant to exert over her, and lo, an echoing vacancy.

Slightly piqued, he made his way to Mrs. Durrant's house. It stood nearer the town of El-Armut, but was built upon the same plan as the Langrishes', save that its garden was larger and boasted a good asphalt tennis-court.

A manservant led him through the house to the garden. Mrs. Durrant rose to meet him as he approached, flushing slightly at the thought of her omitted invitation.

"How nice of you to come, M. de Marsac," she said, with a warmth induced by the spur of conscience.

"Even without an invitation?" he smiled.

"You know that you are always welcome," said Mrs. Durrant.

"You have been kind enough to say so," he reminded her.

"Will you play tennis?"

"I did not bring shoes, not knowing you had a party," he returned.

"That doesn't matter; Jim will lend you a pair. You'll find a splendid partner in either of the Langrishes. They're both awfully good."

Dido gave him a cool hand and Pamela a more friendly greeting.

"Perhaps you will honour me by playing with me, madame?" he said, seized with a desire to punish Dido for her casual manner.

"I shall be delighted," Pamela answered. "It will be the next set, I think. This one is already made up."

Dido and Welland, Judge Weir, and Mrs. Grantham were on the court. For the rest of the day, the girl was surrounded. De Marsac did not get even a chance of trying his new tactics. It was not that she avoided him, or if she did, it was so skilfully done that he was unaware

of it. It was simply that he was crowded out; an entirely novel sensation for the amateur of women, and one which touched him at his tenderest point.

To be thwarted thus, and by a mere girl, flicked him on the raw. Almost he could have believed that he had dreamed that tense little desert episode. Almost he felt as if he must have imagined that glimpse of primitive woman. Memory must have played him false, he assured himself. He had never had that wild bird fluttering beneath his hand.

He watched her, without looking at her, all the afternoon. There was not a gesture, a movement of hers of which he was unaware.

Her coolness, her easy conquest of the older men and the callow youths twisted his lips to a cynical smile beneath the clipped moustache. She had tried her little wiles on him and failed, he told himself. Then suddenly, across the tennis-court, her great eyes opened on his with the fire he had surprised in them before. To his chagrin his heart gave a wild leap in response. His pulses throbbed. His throat swelled.

She had not failed, after all, if she could move him like this. Under the easy flow of conversation an undercurrent of feeling ran, drawing him—whither? Anger surged in him. He was no schoolboy to be fired by a mere girl's glance he thought fiercely.

Yet as he watched the quick slim creature flit about the tennis-ground playing with a crisp dainty precision that invariably made her side the winning one, glancing from beneath her long lashes at the other men, chattering, laughing, commanding—and all the while ignoring him, de Marsac, the most virile man present—he was conscious of an almost overmastering desire to run amongst them, to scatter them right and left, and snatching up this tantaliz-

ing, elusive elf-maid speed away with her to some solitary fastness, and show her who was her master.

The touch of her hand at parting sent fire through him.

"Good-night primitive woman," he murmured for her ear alone.

"We're not primitive here," she answered lightly.
"We're very, very civilized."

"Does it then take the desert to pierce the veneer?"

"Perhaps."

"When are you coming to it again?"

"Oh, I don't know. Ask Mrs. Langrishe," she answered carelessly, though her heart beat so loudly that she thought he must hear it.

"I don't want Mrs. Langrishe, I want *you*," de Marsac said, as if the words were drawn from him against his will.

"Do you?"

"But—yes."

"We mustn't transgress *les convenances*," said Dido veiling her eyes as she looked at him.

"Damn *les convenances!*" muttered de Marsac. Then he caught at swift control. "Pardon, but is that good English, mademoiselle?"

"Excellent English, monsieur," she smiled turning away.

De Marsac bit his lip. In that moment desire was born, resolution made.

"I shall either bend her or break her," he swore to himself, "but have her I will."

From the other side of the court Dido looked back over her shoulder at him childishly, flashing him a smile of farewell.

He had to summon all his resolution to keep himself from following her.

"I will not be whistled to her heel like a dog," he

thought angrily, as he turned to accept Jim Durrant's invitation to drinks and cigars.

Pamela had a word with Mrs. Durrant before she left.

"I think you were mistaken about the dangerousness of poor M. de Marsac," she said.

"Why?"

"Well, he didn't even look at Dido all the afternoon."

"It would have been more natural if he had," murmured Monica Durrant. "One girl amongst all those men, and an oddly attractive one, too! Keep your eye on de Marsac, dear, and trust him as far as you see him, no farther!"

"Dear me, how complicated life seems to be!" sighed Pamela, as she followed the surrounded Dido to the gate with Mr. and Mrs. Weir. "I wonder how many men Dido is going to bring home to dinner to-night."

Mrs. Waring was due to arrive at El-Armut on the day before Christmas Eve.

The very thought of such an essentially winter festival seemed almost incredible to Pamela, in her present atmosphere. The brilliant sunshine, the flowers, the palms made an incongruous setting; and yet, as she reminded herself, it was more or less amid such surroundings that the Christchild had been born. Tender thoughts, secret thoughts mingled with her housewifely anxieties as the time drew nearer.

Christmas was essentially the children's festival, she mused. "Would she ever——?" Then Hassan or Ali would come with a question and break the thread of her gossamer-like wonderings.

"You take far too much trouble over Louisa's room," Dido declared one day, when she discovered that Pamela had got Hassan to place her long mirror therein. "No matter what you do, the place will look unfurnished after

her own home luxuries. We're only picnicking here for the moment. She must put up with things as she finds them."

Pamela, flushed with her hospitable rearrangements, returned the rebuke.

"Do you think you ought to speak of your mother's friend like that, Dido?"

Dido laughed.

"Dear old Mammy Pam, how sentimental you are, I was only a kid when mother died, of course, but I have an excellent memory, and to my recollection the fair Louisa's friendship was a friendship of convenience, nothing more. It suited her book to come to us, for cold weathers in India. It suits her book to come and stay with us now. Affection for poor mother has very little to say to it."

Pamela moved uncomfortably.

"Your father seems to think very highly of her."

"Pam, your besetting sin is a sense of duty," laughed Dido. "Dad would think highly of any woman who talked in a soft voice and was sufficiently platitudinous."

"Come now, Dido!"

"Which is just the same as saying that he's only a man," Dido continued. "Louisa works his wedding-day for all it's worth. Dear old Dad!"

Suddenly Pamela fell from the altitude of her high principles.

"Mrs. Waring told me that she was one of Cousin Helena's *little* bridesmaids."

Dido hooted with joyful derision.

"Little! I like that! She was about as little then as she is now! Priceless! I am looking forward to her

visit. But don't make yourself too agreeable, Pam, or she may stay longer than we wish."

"She couldn't stay shorter than I wish," sighed Pamela. "Only for goodness sake don't let your father know I said so!"

"I'm no more a tell-tale than you are, Pam," retorted Dido.

A secret shared is the strongest of bonds. A mutual dislike runs it close. In spite of her resentment at Doran's hurt, Pamela felt more drawn to her stepdaughter than she had done since the first disillusionment of her arrival. She felt that the girl had no sentimental associations with her mother's old friend. That in itself was a relief. There was also that mutual sex-sympathy which links two women together in wonder at their menfolk's admiration of a third—a pitying wonder, not untinged with amusement.

Langrishe was openly delighted at the prospect of the Christmas party. He and Pamela ransacked the bazaars for gifts for their expected guests. They had dispatched a box of treasures to Carrigrennan weeks before—gold embroidered scarves, bead chains in wonderful blues and greens and yellows, quaint tear-bottles, embroidered leather bags and cases. A black-and-silver shawl was sent separately to Great-Aunt Lucilla.

Generous himself, he pressed her to a lavishness of expenditure hitherto undreamed of. Often, when pricked by some trifle to annoyance, she thought of his goodness to her and hers, with a swelling gratitude which nothing could diminish. With misty eyes she pictured the opening of that treasure-box at Carrigrennan, and wished that she could fly thither to see the sight—her mother's joy and pride in her gold-embroidered scarf, the girls' delight in

their gay trifles, her father's pleasure in his coloured leather note-case and turquoise-blue tear-bottle. She could see that on the study chimneypiece, flanked by the pipe-stand Randall had carved in his schooldays.

But not for anything would she have returned to the old life, with its ceaseless round of trivialities which, on looking back, seemed to matter so little. Here she was in the midst of work, in a land where men did things—big things, whether it were building barrages, tempering native litigation with British justice, or excavating lost temples.

She showed Langrishe the guest-rooms with some pride on the day of Mrs. Waring's arrival. He looked round appraisingly.

"Neat, but not gaudy," he said of Doran's bachelor quarters.

He was more critical of Mrs. Waring's apartment.

"Looks a bit bare, doesn't it?" he said, after a hasty glance.

"Damer! I've had the best things out of my own room put in here!"

"Have you, dear? That's right!" he returned. "I'm sure everything is very nice, only—well, I've been in her house in London, and it seemed to me just the last word in luxury."

"If that's what she wants, why doesn't she stay there?" Pamela blurted out.

"She has a delicate chest. She must follow the sun," explained Langrishe, with admirable patience. "Did she say if she was bringing a maid?"

"She didn't. She hasn't got one. At least, she hadn't on the *Syria*."

"Maids are expensive luxuries," put in Dido unexpectedly from the doorway. "Their tongues have to be bought as well as their services."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE GUEST ARRIVES

LANGRISHE turned on her, lowering as a thunder-cloud.

She met his gaze with imperturbably tilted face.

"Well, Dad? It's true."

"It is not true of Mrs. Waring, at any rate. I'll do you the justice to believe that you don't realize the full meaning of your abominable implication."

"That would be an injustice, Dad."

Langrishe frowned.

"I won't have you say such things of any guest of mine."

"She's not your guest yet. Besides, I only made a general remark. If the cap fits——" Dido shrugged her shoulders, and flitted away. Langrishe turned to Pamela, a feeling of helplessness undermining his anger.

"That child is getting beyond herself. I won't have it."

"Don't," Pamela advised him significantly.

"Can't you use your influence?"

"I haven't any. Besides when she first came, Dido warned me that our friendship entirely depended on my not trying to influence her, 'or any tosh of that sort.' I think those were her exact words," said Pamela calmly.

Langrishe made an inarticulate sound, raised his hand and let it fall again, as if recognizing the futility of further argument.

"Heloise will be here in time for tea. I'll meet her and bring her straight home."

"Very well. I'll get Mahmud to make some of his

delicious little tea cakes," said Pamela, with a desire for conciliation.

When he had gone she sat down, wondering heavily if the mere mention of Heloise Waring's name were sufficient to create such a jarring atmosphere what would her real presence evoke?

As often happens, anticipation exceeded reality; at least as far as the arrival went.

It was a very gracious lady who floated into Pamela's drawing-room at five o'clock, with outstretched hands.

"But how charming you have made this room!" she cried. "Quite homelike. It's really delicious after the bustle of hotel life. It was sweet of you both to ask me here for Christmas." She looked from one to the other. "It's such a home festival."

"It was sweet of you to come," said Langrishe, beaming at her from where he stood with his back to the fire. "I daresay there will be all sorts of *tamashas* on in Cairo. The wonder is how you tore yourself away."

Mrs. Waring threw back the floating veil that made such a becoming background for her fairness.

"One gets a little tired of such *tamashas*. They count for nothing where friendship is concerned." She smiled up into Langrishe's eyes as she took a cup of tea from his hands; then, descending to the mundane, she turned to Pamela. "How do you get your cook to make such heavenly little cakes? Or perhaps, your own clever fingers? You look as if you would be a domestic treasure."

Pamela, who felt unreasonably irritated by this encomium, tried to answer lightly.

"Like George Washington; 'I cannot tell a lie, Papa.' It is Mahmud who is the domestic treasure this time!" She hated herself for her flippancy the moment she had

spoken. Damer would think her so silly ; but Mrs. Waring had always the effect of making her say the wrong thing, or feel as if she had said it, which was just as bad.

"Such a stickler for the truth, dear Mrs. Langrishe ! But no," Heloise Waring declared, delicately biting a tea-cake, and looking from host to hostess. "I positively can't be so formal with your wife, Damer. I must call her Pamela, and she must call me Heloise—won't you ?" she thrust suddenly.

Pamela reddened.

"It's awfully kind of you to want me to, but I'm very bad at calling people by their Christian names. Of course, you must call me Pamela, but——"

"Why, even little Dido calls me Heloise," put in Mrs. Waring, raising amused brows.

Pamela's lips twitched at the remembrance of what Dido really called their guest. She sought for an answer, but Mrs. Waring spared her the trouble by continuing pleasantly :

"Of course, you are still rather a country mouse, aren't you ? But you will get used to all the strangeness in time, won't she, Damer ?"

"Of course," Langrishe answered. "But Pam is wonderful ! She is quite acclimatized by this."

"Really ? And where is Dido ? Playing havoc among all the young men, I suppose."

"Playing tennis over at the Barrage——"

"Which comes practically to the same thing," Mrs. Waring said, smiling. "You won't have her long on your hands, Damer."

"Damer's in no hurry to get rid of her," put in Pamela quickly.

"I didn't mean to suggest anything so crude. Dido is only having the playtime now which is every girl's

due. Dear child! In many cases she reminds me so of——” she stopped and sighed, as if she feared that a reference to the first wife might be tactless in the presence of the second.

Pamela reddened uncomfortably, but Langrishe spoke with his usual bluntness.

“Oh, Helena? Oh, no, I don’t think she’s really like her, except, perhaps, the colour of her hair. Helena’s didn’t curl like Dido’s, but her complexion was far better.”

To Pamela’s relief, his tone held a quiet, unemotional reminiscence, nothing more.

Heloise Waring spoke as softly as if the half-forgotten dead lay within the house.

“Ah, yes. She had a complexion of milk and roses.”

Somewhat to his own surprise, Langrishe found himself desirous of vaunting the whiteness of Pamela’s skin. It was an absurd impulse, scotched as soon as born.

“Wouldn’t you like to go to your room and rest before dinner?” Pamela asked. “You must be tired after your journey.”

“Well, perhaps a little.” Mrs. Waring rose and looked round for gloves and wrap.

Pamela had already picked them up and stood waiting. It suddenly occurred to her that the reason her guest dispensed with a maid was because she always found somebody ready to perform these little services for her.

Mrs. Waring paused for a moment, glancing round to see if anything else were forgotten. Then she said lightly:

“Have you discovered the whereabouts of Mr. Doran yet?”

To her chagrin Pamela found herself blushing as Langrishe replied:

“Yes. He’s up at Tahta, not so very far from this.

You'll have an opportunity of renewing your acquaintance with him, Heloise, for he's coming down to-morrow to spend Christmas with us."

"To spend Christmas here?" Mrs. Waring exclaimed, as if surprised. Then she shot a swift glance from Langrishe to Pamela. "That will be very—interesting," she added, as she went gracefully out of the room.

CHAPTER XXIV

PAMELA TRIES TO LAY A GHOST

PAMELA felt as if the whole atmosphere of the house had changed as she opened the door of Mrs. Waring's room and ushered her into it.

"I hope you will be comfortable here," she said, with an instinct of hospitality which no mere dislike could quell. "If you haven't everything you want, just let me know, and I'll see that you get it. The bathroom is quite near, but you can have your bath in your room, if you prefer it."

"Every luxury!" smiled Mrs. Waring graciously. "It all seems wonderful to a nomad like me."

Pamela, thinking that she had never seen a person to whom the term nomad could be less aptly applied, continued her hospitable recital.

"You would prefer your breakfast in bed, I'm sure. We are very early birds here. Damer likes to get across to the Barrage in good time; but there is no use in rousing you at that hour."

"Well, perhaps not," Mrs. Waring admitted. "Though I can adapt myself to almost any circumstances. I'm such an old traveller, you know. You haven't a maid, I suppose?"

"I haven't. I don't know what I'd do with one."

Mrs. Waring smiled a trifle disappointedly.

"Ah, you're still a country mouse, I see. But I thought that Damer would have been sure to insist on having a maid to look after his new treasure. Poor Helena always had one."

Pamela, resentfully unable to decide whether "country mouse" or "new treasure" were the more offensive term, blurted out:

"I'm not as helpless as cousin Helena was. Damer knows that I was never accustomed to having a maid to look after me."

"Ah, no. Your circumstances were rather different perhaps." Mrs. Waring unpinned her veil and removed her hat.

"Totally different," returned Pamela bluntly. "Now I must leave you to rest. We dine at eight." She hesitated in the doorway, urged by her insistent sense of duty. "Can I help you to unpack?"

"I couldn't dream of troubling you, dear Pamela. Perhaps if you would send little Dido to me when she comes in. . . . She would help me to put away my things."

"Very well, I will." Pamela closed the door behind her, glad to escape. "How can Damer like her? How *can* he? There's insincerity in every tone, in her very walk! She doesn't even step honestly, she glides along. He's a good enough judge of a man. How is it that he's so hoodwinked by a woman. Is Dido right, I wonder? Are all men like that? Can any woman take them in if she talks gently enough and makes eyes at them?"

Puzzled, Pamela ran downstairs, hoping for a word alone with Langrishe before Dido came home. But in this she was disappointed, for there in the drawing-room, racket in hand, sat Dido. Perched on the arm of her father's chair, she was giving him a crisp account of her afternoon.

This time it was Pamela who felt *de trop*. All at once the sensation seized her that she was a stranger, the alien; that all the others, Heloise Waring, Damer, Dido, were all linked together by a common past in which she had no

real part; that she stood outside the magic circle which enclosed them in its ring. It was a chilling sensation, even disintegrating while it lasted, but it was of short duration.

Dido jumped up at her entry and came towards her.

"Good old Mammy Pam? You've put our guest comfortable behind the purdah till dinner-time! Come and rest yourself now. You've been working hard all day!"

Pamela smiled, feeling warmed.

"Oh, I'm not really tired. But, Dido, Mrs. Waring said she would like to see you when you came in. She wants you to help her to unpack."

Dido, her back safely towards her father, made a grimace.

"I offered, but she wouldn't let me. She preferred you naturally," Pamela went on.

"Unnaturally, if she only realized it. You're twice as nice as I am, old thing."

"Come, Dido, run along. You ought to be delighted at a chance of being of use for once in your life," said Langrishe, in what Dido called his "So far and no farther" tone. When he used it she knew that it meant business; that she could neither creep under it, walk round it, nor leap over it. It was a "No Thoroughfare" sort of tone, which completely blocked any evasion of its commands.

"The sooner 'tis over the sooner to sleep," quoted Dido resignedly. "Oh, Damer, Damer, thou little knowest what thou hast done in loosing this maidless female upon us!"

"Run away and earn your dinner," smiled Langrishe. "To-morrow you'll have a young man to amuse you."

"Oh, he's Pam's property, not mine," said Dido lightly as she went out of the room.

When she had gone Langrishe turned to his wife and pulled a chair near the fire for her. As she sank into it Pamela had a foolish regret that he had not taken her in his arms. It would have been sweet to rest for a little on his strength, to feel that nothing nor no one could come between them. Instead, he strode to the fireplace and stood there, looking down at her.

"Well, Pam," he said pleasantly, "was Heloise satisfied? Had she everything she wanted? Is she quite comfortable?"

"Oh, quite," murmured Pamela flatly, leaning back into the shadow of her high-backed chair. "She said that we had every luxury here, and that it all seemed wonderful to a nomad like her."

"Yes. She's always been a great traveller," mused Langrishe comfortably. "Still, one doesn't like to think of a woman like that having to rough it."

"Why not? Why shouldn't she rough it sometimes, like everyone else? It would do her a world of good." Pamela was tired, and, consequently, a little cross.

"Well, look at her type," said Langrishe good-humouredly. "She always looks as if she had just come out of a bandbox, floating veil and all! You can't see that type really roughing it, can you?"

"No, I suppose not," Pamela admitted, soothed a little by something in his tone.

"Now, you, Pam—you're different. You'd ride along by a man's side, tramp beside him if necessary, camp with him in the wilds, and cook the meat he shot, without turning a hair."

"Would I? But I'm only a country mouse, you see." She could not help the tang in her voice.

"Pam!"

At the hurt in his tone, she sprang from her chair and was in his arms in an instant.

"Forgive me, my dear one. I didn't really mean to be cross. I am a little tired, but there's no excuse for me."

"Don't you care to think that I look on you as my mate?"

"Of course I care. It means everything to me. Only I'm not—I'm not—we're not in the wilds. I scarcely see anything of you. I don't cook your dinner even. Other people are by your side. Your work absorbs you. So long as I'm there when you come in that's all you want!"

"Well, and isn't that enough?"

"It's not. It isn't half enough. I would love to be with you as you said. Tramping the world with you, and not having to bother about other people. Couldn't we go somewhere, just you and I, and be really by ourselves for a little?"

Even as she voiced the absurd plea, she knew how impossible it was.

"Now you are being foolish, little girl," said Langrishe tolerantly, putting a tender hand on her head that lay against him, and thinking that surely women were the most fantastically unreasonable beings in the world. "You know we couldn't escape just now. Later on, when Dido goes to stay with Heloise, I might take a week off and we could run up to Luxor, Assuan, or perhaps camp out by Lake Karûn in the Fayoum if you preferred it. How would you like that?"

"I'd love it," breathed Pamela on a deep sigh, wishing that they could flee then and there. Suddenly the desire seized her to put into words something which had long lain at the back of her mind. "Damer," she whispered,

so low that he had to bend his head to hear her. "I wonder if you'd mind telling me something."

"I'll tell you anything in the world you care to ask, if I can."

"It's only this." She hesitated for a moment, then went on. "Damer, what—what was Helena *really* to you?"

The impalpable aura of the dead wife permeated the atmosphere around Pamela. Its spirit had to be exorcized before she could resume normality. But she had chosen an unpropitious moment for her question. Langrishe was in no mood for sentimental reassurances. Subconsciously, the presence of Heloise Waring had drawn the past about him like a veil, slightly dimming his present happiness. Pamela could not have mentioned his first wife to him more inopportunistly.

She was sharply conscious of this the moment the words were uttered, for Langrishe moved a little away from her, and took her clasping hands from his shoulders.

"Helena was my wife," he returned gravely, holding her at arm's length both physically and mentally. "She is dead now. We will not talk of her, please."

"I'm sorry I asked. Forgive me," said Pamela faintly.

"My dear girl, there is nothing to forgive. I think we'd better go and change now."

"Yes."

As Pamela went slowly out of the room, Langrishe had a momentary desire to go after her and kiss away that rather pathetic little droop from her mouth. She had gone before the impulse materialized, and instead he drew out the gun-metal cigarette case which had been her wedding-present to him, and lit a cigarette before he followed her.

He stood there, musing as he smoked by the fire. He was happy, happy with a deeper happiness than had ever been his, and it was to Pamela he owed it. If the joys of pursuit, of capture, and of final triumph had been lacking in his courtship, his was now the full content of possession. Pamela knew that he loved her, that he wanted her. What more did the girl desire? He could not be always saying so, could he? Those things belonged to the honeymoon rather than to the full, rich, contented life they were now leading. He did not realize that no matter how sure a woman is of a man's love she always craves to hear him put it into words. What he takes for granted she concludes does not exist, unless he frequently assures her of its vitality:

Still, Langrishe was half-shamefacedly conscious that he had failed Pamela just now, untimely though her tentative appeal had been.

He threw his cigarette into the fire and ran upstairs, two steps at a time.

Pamela looked round at his abrupt entry. She was doing her hair at the dressing-table, and her smooth young arms slipped whitely out of her blue silk sleeves.

He came over to her, caught one uplifted arm and kissed the hollow inside the elbow.

"Pam," he whispered, with a boyish eagerness that thrilled her. "Helena—was a shattered dream. You are a dear, warm, human reality!"

"Damer!" With a choked cry she put up her arms and drew him down to her.

Her heart leaped beneath his hand. She felt that now she really tasted happiness for the first time, in spite of all that had gone before.

Her fatigue was forgotten. For the rest of the evening she shone, subduing even Heloise Waring by her gaiety.

She and Dido tossed the ball of conversation lightly between them, while Damer laughed, and Mrs. Waring looked on with a smile which gradually froze from amusement to contempt.

"What it is to be young!" she murmured to Langrishe at last. "Dido dear, if you would be sweet enough to fetch me a wrap I should like to go out on the terrace for a little with your father. I want to see the Nile by moonlight, and to get a glimpse of that wonderful Barrage of which I hear so much."

"Righto!" cried Dido, jumping up, and returning in an incredibly short time with a beautiful ermine stole. "Let's all go!"

Pamela laid a restraining hand on her arm. "No. Stay here with me, and tell me all about your afternoon."

"You've heard every detail twice already," the girl retorted.

Pamela put a finger on her lip as Heloise Waring trailed towards the window, murmuring: "I want to hear all about your work, Damer. I think it is so thrilling. The idea of imposing the will of man, puny man, in the immemorial Nile, harnessing his forces, gathering them up and storing them so that they may nourish the ancient land and make the desert blossom like the rose."

"Does he *really* like that sort of tosh?" cried Dido as the soft voice melted into silence.

"I wonder?" said Pamela, her eyes star-bright. "I'm quite willing to let him have as much of it as ever he wants!"

Dido looked at her for a moment, then chuckled.

"*Surfeit slays mair nor the sword,*" she quoted. "You've the wisdom of the serpent, Mammy Pam."

"Between the pair of you I need it!"

"Don't couple me with Louisa, please."

"I didn't. It was your father!"

"Oh, I don't mind that." Dido's face softened. "The dear old mole!" Then she startled Pamela by a sudden thrust. "Pam, what sort of a *dossier* have you?"

"What on earth do you mean?" asked Pamela utterly puzzled.

"A *dossier* is a police record of your past life."

"Why then, Dido——"

"I mean, jokes apart, is there anything in your past life that you'd rather people didn't know?"

"*Dido!*" Pamela cried, with burning cheeks.

"All right. I was sure there wasn't. But our charming Louisa put me through a perfect cross-examination this afternoon about you and your antecedents. Half her questions I couldn't answer, so I invented——"

"Oh, Dido!"

"I never knew before that my name could be uttered in so many different keys!" said Dido flippantly. "You needn't be uneasy, Mammy Pam. If people only knew, there would be a perfect queue for the past I gave you. I even said that your gardener refused to grow any flowers that weren't white! I remembered noticing that as a child! I was convincingly circumstantial."

"Ah, now, Dido, what am I to believe?" said Pamela uneasily. "Is there one word of truth in what you've been saying?"

"Two!" answered Dido promptly. "Our 'little bridesmaid' *was* asking searching questions about you, and I assured her that there was positively nothing I could give away—to your detriment, I mean! She begged of me to confide in her. 'Stepmothers, no matter how well-meaning they may be, are always so——'" She dropped her voice to an exaggerated drawl. "Are you always so, Pam?"

"I'm sure I don't know," returned Pamela half amused, half uneasy. "I only know that Mrs. Waring has called me three most offensive names since she arrived to-day."

"Not really! How priceless! Do tell me what they were?"

"A domestic treasure, a country mouse, and now, well-meaning!"

"The last shall be worst!" mis-quoted Dido, remembering as she said it where and by whom she had last heard the true version quoted.

Even as she laughed and jested a sudden wild longing seized her, for the sound of de Marsac's voice, the touch of his thin brown hand. She had still two days to wait for it; two long interminable days. From now until dinner-time on Christmas Day! Oh, why, why hadn't Dad asked him to stay instead of Tubby Doran? He was the lonelier of the two, if it came to that. He had only come to El-Armut once since that unforgettable hour in the desert. Was that her fault? Suppose it was. Well, a curiously tender smile curved her mobile lips. She would be kinder to him on Christmas Day. She would not evade him again.

She slipped off the arm of the chair on which she had been perched, as Langrishe and Mrs. Waring came back through the French window.

"I thought you girls were coming out?" he said.

"We were afraid of the night air for our complexions," said Dido impudently.

"My dear saucy child!" smiled Heloise Waring, with an ineffectual pat at the cheek, which melted away at the approach of the smooth white hand. "You have no need to fear such things yet." She turned to Pamela with the slightly patronizing air which she had adopted towards her ever since their first meeting; an attitude which

always aroused the girl's worst feelings. "I wonder if you realize your privileges, Pamela?" She smiled silkily. "Why, you are almost making history here. At least you are, Damer."

"Scarcely that. I am only the engineer in charge of another chap's idea. I am the more or less mechanical means of seeing that it is properly carried out."

"Treason! I won't have it," cried Mrs. Waring, looking round the little group. "Pamela! Dido! How can you stand there and hear the dear man malign himself by calling himself mechanical? As if it didn't take brains, skill, knowledge of the world, the art of managing men, and a dozen other qualities to do what he's doing!"

"Come now, spare my blushes," said Langrishe awkwardly, while Dido murmured into Pamela's ear: "I can't quite decide whether our Louisa is more paralysing when she's arch or when she's merely sentimental."

Pamela, in an agony lest Mrs. Waring should overhear, suggested a move to bed.

CHAPTER XXV

AN EGYPTIAN CHRISTMAS

No ice-bound land, no bare, frost-gemmed trees, no blinding, white fog to grip the throat and make the eyes smart, not even the moist green Yule that makes the fat kirk-yard!

Instead, a sky of deepest blue, in which kites poised and circled, screaming thinly, a shimmering stretch of water, crisped to sparkles by a light wind, purple-winged swallows hawking for flies, black and white kingfishers darting along by the mud banks of the Durrants' garden, on which dragon-flies bask in brilliant sunlight, to rise, when startled, into the crystal-clear air with a tiny metallic clashing of wings.

There had been a quaint little service in the Durrants' cool, square hall, where Jim Durrant had read the morning service, Langrishe the lesson for the day, and the rest of the congregation joined in the chants and hymns with eyes which did not see very clearly, while more than one throat suddenly swelled with an irrepressible lump. Twinkle, the elder of the Durrant babies, had claimed the privilege of collecting, and went round with the bag so solemnly that Pamela felt an almost irresistible desire to snatch him up and kiss him.

Heloise Waring, who had at first been prepared to smile at the little service—just like children playing at church!—changed her tone at the genuine note of simple sincerity, and sang. “O come, all ye faithful” as fervently as her

rather weedy voice would permit. It was all just too sweet for words, she declared afterwards to Mrs. Durrant.

The Langrishe party had been invited to stay on to luncheon after the service, and Mrs. Durrant had arranged a tennis tournament for the afternoon, in which the real prizes were the inadequate supply of women partners.

"We got the judge to draw, knowing that our local representative of law and order should be above suspicion," said Jim Durrant, his eyes twinkling behind his glasses.

"It was putting a severe strain on my probity," Judge Weir declared. "I felt that in recompense the Fates should have given me Mrs. Langrishe for a partner, but, alas, they didn't!"

"Who am I to have?" asked Pamela eagerly.

"The undeserving Doran."

There was a chorus of voices.

"Good old Tubby!"

"Some people have all the luck!"

"Erin go bragh!"

"Cheerio!"

"Poor Mrs. Langrishe!"

Then, very clearly, after the subsidence of noise:

"My dear Pamela, what an extraordinary coincidence!" from Heloise Waring.

"It is rather funny—the two wild Irish being drawn together," Pamela said laughing. "Tim and I have often played together before now."

"Yes, indeed," returned Mrs. Waring sweetly. "And more games than tennis, too."

"Do you play, Mrs. Waring?" asked Monica Durrant, sensing a slight tension.

"Alas, no. I sprained my wrist some years ago, which has prevented me from playing any sort of game since."

"Except your own particular one," murmured Dido in Pamela's ear.

Pamela drew her swiftly aside.

"Dido, that sort of thing simply isn't done. You must *not* make remarks about Mrs. Waring before her. I am in constant agony for fear she will overhear."

"Let her," said Dido flippantly. Then, seeing that Pamela's distress was genuine, she went on. "Look here, Mammy Pam, if I don't have some little outlet I shall burst. Better to let me fizz like that in your ear than go off with one concentrated bang! Now isn't it? Especially as our Louisa is the least bit deaf."

"I suppose so, but see that it *is* in my ear and not in hers."

"You lamb, I wonder if you realize how boring you are? I want to know who has drawn me." She ran back to the group surrounding Judge Weir, and asked in her clearest tones:

"Do tell me, Judge, who is my fate?"

Judge Weir turned towards her with mock solemnity and answered, as if he were delivering a judgment:

"Your fate, Miss Dido, is M. Raoul de Marsac!"

In the universal chorus of groans, Dido's little gasp and quickly-drawn breath went unnoticed, as did the paling of her bitten lip.

"Where is the wretch?" asked Judge Weir, looking round. "Why doesn't he come forward to claim his prize? Is it possible that he is so lost to all sense of decency as not to have arrived yet? De Marsac, stand forth! Why, here's the fellow only just coming down from the house!"

Dido's heart-beats quickened painfully as the slight, athletic-looking figure came across the garden towards them. She could have picked him out among a thousand

at any distance, she thought. He was different from the other men, more distinguished, of finer, cleaner line. She cast a disparaging glance at Doran's loosely-built lankiness.

"How could I ever even have imagined that I cared for him?" she thought, with a contempt for past folly which would have wounded the other participant in it to the core could he have read her flickering look.

"Happy Christmas, everybody," called de Marsac, as he approached. "What is the excitement, M. le Juge?"

"The excitement is your draw for the tennis tournament. The god, whose temple you are excavating, has favoured you and given you Miss Dido Langrishe as a partner. Offer him a special libation to-morrow, young man."

"His libation shall be poured from a cup of gold," said de Marsac, with a note in his voice that thrilled Dido.

It took all that she possessed of courage and self-control to meet his eyes and put her hand in his.

"So—you are my fate?"

"Or you are mine."

The words on the surface meant no more than those which any of the other prospective partners had exchanged, but underneath, they pulsed and throbbed with a meaning, realized only by the two who uttered them. For an instant Dido and de Marsac seemed to stand alone, the sole real people in the world of shadows, conscious of each other in every fibre, thrilled by the knowledge of each other's nearness.

At the moment, the phase antagonistic seemed to have passed away, to be succeeded by the phase conciliatory. Subconsciously the season of peace on earth swayed them. They had laid down their weapons. Each was desirous only of pleasing the other.

"We should combine well, mademoiselle."

"I have not played tennis with you yet, monsieur."

"What does that matter? We play together now. You are swift, irresistible as fire, I, a rock which the fire cannot harm."

It was a distinct challenge. She caught it up. "Even rocks can be broken, monsieur."

"And fire caught and tamed." His dark eyes met and held hers until she turned them away.

"Why do we quarrel like this when we meet?" she asked softly.

"It is the untameable, the primitive in each that waits for its master," de Marsac answered, throwing back his head. "Your flame laps me round, but it cannot devour me. My rock menaces you, but cannot, at the moment, extinguish you."

Dido laughed, and de Marsac felt as if she had suddenly leaped away from his tangible hold. "I don't believe that you are a rock after all. I think you are just an excellent imitation made of painted wood, and that you are desperately afraid of the fire which you pretend to defy."

"Perhaps you are right," he murmured. "It is a fierce little flame when it is angry."

"Has it ever burned you?"

"Scarcely burned, scorched, perhaps," he answered. "But even to be scorched hurts a little."

"Does it? I'm sorry," said Dido, in a tone which no one else had ever heard from her. Then, as if repenting of her momentary softening: "We had better get back to the others. They will be waiting for us."

De Marsac looked at the group by the tennis-court.

"No! they do not want us yet. They have put on two other couples to play. Come with me down to the path

by the river for a moment. I have something to say to you."

"What is it?" asked Dido eagerly.

A tangled hedge of scarlet-flowered hibiscus hid them from the others. Dido looked up into de Marsac's face as she walked by his side along the beaten mud path. She was all in white to-day, except for the amber chain which had been her father's Christmas box, the amber ribbon round her Panama hat, and her aureole of golden hair.

Suddenly de Marsac stopped and put out a lean brown hand which trembled slightly as it touched the bright swirl.

"This is no saint's nimbus," he said, a trifle unsteadily.
"It is the flaming tip of a snow-white wand."

"That's pretty," cried Dido childishly.

For a moment her real youthfulness peeped out from behind the mask of sophistication which usually hid it. De Marsac almost looked to see her clap her hands. Then a wild impulse seized him to snatch her up in his arms, run into the desert with her, shake her, beat her, perhaps, but kiss her until the elf in her turned into a warm yielding woman.

Instead, he took his desirous hand from the silky mop and, plunging it into his pocket, drew out a little leather case.

"A trifling gift from your other lover," he said as lightly as he could.

"My other lover?" she echoed.

He pressed the lid of the case. It sprang open to disclose the emblem of Ré, the sun god, a winged sun-disc with the royal serpent curled round it. The wings were of fine enamel in yellow orange and the beautiful Egyptian red. The sun itself, clasped by a golden serpent, was represented by a round, straw-coloured topaz.

"Ré sends you this by the hand of his unworthy ambassador," he said in the same tone. "Will you honour him—and me—by accepting it, mademoiselle?"

Dido stood very still, the little box clasped in her hands, and wonderful light in her great dark eyes.

"You thought of this? You had it made for me?"

De Marsac bent his head. Dido saw nothing theatrical in the gesture. She was heart and soul now in the game that they were playing. In any other man she would have dubbed the metaphorical thrust and parry, this play of simile and equivoque "absolute tosh," but with de Marsac life took on another colour and meaning; and interpretation tinged with a magic and a glamour such as she had never known before.

"Tell Ré to be careful," she continued, with a little unsteady laugh. "Sometimes an ambassador finds more favour in the eyes of——"

"Dido! Dido! Where are you? We're waiting for you," Pamela's voice called just behind the hedge.

There was a flicker of white skirt, and she appeared in an opening. The world of reality closed down upon the two once more. For the rest of the day, until the triumphant close of the tournament, in which Dido and de Marsac proved the victors, they had not a word apart.

Then after the final game in the failing light, which won them their hard fought fight, de Marsac turned triumphantly to his partner.

"Together we are invincible, p'tite primitive," he murmured.

"Isn't the victory the proof of our civilization?" she retorted, but her eyes said that from which her lips refrained.

Tiny beads, as of dew, stood on her little provocative nose and forehead. Her cheeks were flushed and an un-

wonted pink. Her hair lay in damp rings about her face. As he looked at her admiringly, an odd commendation sprang to his mind.

"Mon dieu," he thought, "she is the only girl I have ever seen who perspired prettily!"

The other women looked hot and tired, even in the becomingly shaded light of Mrs. Durrant's drawing-room; all save Heloise Waring, who was cool and fair as usual, but inwardly rather bored.

Pamela made an early move, to which she responded with alacrity.

"Rest and a tub, before the evening's festivities," she suggested. "We really must be going."

"And remember," warned Langrishe, "you are all to come early and stay late!"

CHAPTER XXVI

HELOISE CHANGES HER TACTICS

EVEN the old become young at a Christmas Day dinner-party; and when its most senior member is but forty-two, and a youthful-spirited forty-two at that, the fun may well wax fast and furious.

There were no *tête-à-têtes* among the young people that night at the house on the river-bank. The after-dinner amusements merged from singing to round games, from games to cock-fighting, from cock-fighting to various tricks and catches until every side ached and every throat was hoarse with laughter.

Even Doran and de Marsac seemed momentarily to have called a truce in their subconscious warfare. Dido held a hand of each in one of the absurd games they played, and wondered idly why one touch should send fiery thrills up her arm while the other warm grip left her cold and pulseless.

She wore her sun-disc brooch, and told everyone that it was a gift from the great god Ré himself.

"Dear little Dido is quite 'fey to-night,'" murmured Heloise Waring once in Langrishe's ear.

"Don't say that," he returned quite sharply. "Don't you know that that expression is used only of a person under the shadow of a sudden or violent death?"

"My dear Damer!" She looked at him with pitying amusement. "You surely don't mean to say that you are superstitious?"

He glanced round to see that Pamela had not heard, as he answered decisively: "Certainly not. But that expression—and of Dido——"

"Ah, you are wrapped up in the child, and no wonder! She is such a dainty brilliant little creature," smiled Mrs. Waring, who could afford to praise whole-heartedly anyone of such an absolutely different type from hers. Then, as she sent a quiet look round the romping circle from which she and Langrishe had been weeded out in their turn, the memory of the years with which she had once credited Pamela seemed suddenly to have become erased from her mind, for she said with a puzzled frown and deprecating smile: "Your Pamela, too, looks a mere child. I wonder you ventured, dear Damer. There's such a big gap, isn't there?"

Langrishe, looking at Pamela's hot cheeks and starry eyes answered absently: "Yes, she does look well tonight, doesn't she?"

"Very well, quite charming," returned Mrs. Waring on a slightly sharpened note. "But absurdly young to be the mistress of an establishment like this."

Langrishe smiled.

"Doesn't she do it jolly well, though? Of course, she and her mother practically ran Carrigrennan——"

"How wonderful of them! And it was there that poor young Doran used to run in and out all day, just as he does here."

"Why poor young Doran?" asked Langrishe, ignoring the rest of the sentence.

"He's very susceptible, isn't he?"

"Is he? How do you know? Did he try to make love to you, Heloise?"

Mrs. Waring looked down and then up. Her eyelashes were very effective against the fairness of her skin.

"Poor foolish boy, I did mother him a little just at first, but, of course, he did not want me once your Pamela appeared on the scene. There was much too close a bond between them for any newer friendship to—"

"Yes, they were practically brought up together. Doran himself told me that in those old days Pamela was more than a sister to him."

Mrs. Waring lifted amused brows.

"I must say that I can't altogether believe in girls who are more than sisters to young men to whom they are not related. I—don't misunderstand me, dear old friend, when I say that if I were you I shouldn't encourage these—these less than brothers—"

"You're wanted now, you two," Dido danced up to them.

"We're going to play a game called 'musical instruments.' You must all sit in a circle and I'll explain."

Afterwards, when the last guest had gone, and Langrishe was lighting Mrs. Waring's candle for her in the hall, he said suddenly: "There's not such a gap between Pamela and me, after all, Heloise. She's twenty-eight—"

"Really? She looked about eighteen to-night."

"And I'm only forty-two! Just fourteen years. And we're very near in spirit."

"Ah, it's the spirit that really matters," murmured Mrs. Waring, as she went softly to the foot of the stairs.

She turned there to send him a tenderly pitying, sweetly comprehending look. The candle-light shone upwards on her face, detaching its calm fairness from the dusky background of the staircase.

"It is the spiritual contact which really counts," she repeated. "The call of youth to youth is only of the blood, of course, merely physical. Good-night, dear Damer. It has been a wonderful Christmas."

"Good-night, Heloise," he answered slowly, thinking how sweet she looked as she stood there with her softly falling draperies of midnight blue, and her strangely wistful expression as she spoke of the spiritual nearness which was all that mattered.

But it was when he suddenly awoke later on in the night that her words returned like teasing gnats to sting him.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE CALL OF YOUTH

THE call of youth to youth! What on earth did she mean? More than sister. Less than brother—unwise encouragement. Was it just—talk, or was she really hinting at anything? He could not stand that.

With all the directness of a naturally frank and sincere nature, Langrishe hated hints and innuendoes. He fell asleep again on a resolution to tackle Heloise next day and find out what she really meant. Dido, too. He was not going to let her accept presents of jewellery without knowing from whom they came—women were really—Sleep banished thought.

His opportunity with Dido came first. Work was off for Boxing Day, and they were to have a picnic luncheon at the Barrage and a scratch Gymkhana afterwards.

Breakfast was later than usual, but Mrs. Waring had not yet appeared when Pamela and Doran went out on the terrace to practice putting. Dido was following them when Langrishe stopped her.

“Look here, little girl, who gave you that brooch?” he asked without preamble.

Dido caught her breath. She felt instinctively that her father would not approve of the sun-god’s offering, but she had no intention of giving up her treasure.

“Didn’t I tell you yesterday that it was the mighty Ré?”

“Come! No nonsense, Dido. I mean, really?”

"Oh, if you mean really, it was M. de Marsac."

"De Marsac?" Langrishe's tone was curt. "Why did he give it to you?"

"Oh, just as a little memento of our day at the excavations," answered Dido airily, though her breath quickened apprehensively. "He had it especially made for me. Wasn't it sweet of him?"

"I don't like you to take presents of jewellery from men, little daughter."

"But this isn't exactly a present of jewellery, big father. It's just a little memento of my first glimpse of the desert."

"I don't like it, all the same. I have a good mind to make you give the thing back to de Marsac at once."

Dido slipped a coaxing hand through his arm and rubbed her head against his coat-sleeve.

"You'd have a very bad mind if you did a thing like that, Dad," she murmured, in her most wheedling tones. "It would hurt poor M. de Marsac very much if we were so rude as to return his little gift."

Langrishe hesitated, feeling, for once, rather unable to cope with the situation. He did not want to make too much of the episode, nor did he desire altogether to conceal his disapproval. In spite of what Pamela had said, he had a deeply rooted belief in the virginal, white-paper minds of young girls. He did not wish to inscribe anything undesirable on Dido's snowy sheet, or to instil ideas about men and their intentions that might not be already there.

At last he spoke, reluctantly, as if the words were forced from him. "De Marsac didn't mean anything by giving you this, child?"

Dido flashed great eyes at him, reading him like an open book. "Mean anything? Of course he did, dad. He meant to show his appreciation of your hospitality by

giving me this charming little memento of my silly joke about the sun-god. It all began in fun, really. I think it would be making too much of it to give the brooch back to him, as if it were—— He might think that we thought—that—oh, Dad, it wouldn't do at all!"

"N—no. Perhaps it wouldn't," admitted Langrishe musingly.

"It isn't even as if he were English," Dido pursued, following up her advantage. "Frenchmen probably see things from a different point of view from ours. They——"

"Very well. That's enough about it. But it must be the last, remember. Flowers, books or sweets, if you like, but I won't have anything more."

"You needn't, Dad dear. I promise."

Dido jumped up and kissed him, alight with joy at her success. She meant what she said, too. She would not take presents of which her father did not approve, so long as she might keep her precious sun-disc. She made a sort of bargain with her conscience about it.

Langrishe, not completely satisfied, patted her shoulder.

"Then that's that. Now run out on the terrace and tell Pam I want her."

Dido, nothing loth, ran off to give the message.

Pamela pressed her putter into the girl's hand before she went back to the house.

"Tim has beaten me nine times out of ten. See if you can give him a licking now."

Dido made a shot at the depression in the ground at which they were aiming and sent her ball several yards beyond it.

"Bad beginning," she exclaimed, as she went to retrieve it.

Doran followed her.

"I don't want any more of this. Can you sit on the wall and talk to me a bit?"

"With pleasure. Have you got a cigarette? I left my case inside." Dido perched herself on the parapet and swung a nonchalant foot to and fro.

Doran pulled out his case and handed it to her. Then he said in a low tone: "Curly, are you never going to speak to me again?"

"Don't call me that," said Dido sharply. "I won't have it. Curly, and all that she represents, died and was buried long ago."

"Not as far as I am concerned."

"Tubby, we can't have any resurrections in this affair."

"What do you mean?"

"Didn't we agree that our stolen fruit episode must be forgotten?" she asked under her breath.

"I can never forget it."

"But you must. Curly is dead, as I told you. It is only with Dido that you have to do in the future."

"But Dido won't let me come near her. She never even speaks to me," Doran complained.

"I'm speaking to you now. What do you want me to say?"

"Can't you be a little kinder?"

"No, Tubby," answered the girl inexorably. "If I were kinder you might only misunderstand."

Doran caught the hand that was playing with his cigarette-case and held it for a moment in a fierce grip.

"Misunderstand? Do you mean to say that you have forgotten what we once were to each other?"

Dido looked full at him with a candour that knew no softening. "I haven't forgotten, but it seems absolutely incredible to me now."

"Our—our midsummer dream means nothing to you, then?"

"Less than nothing." Her cool detached words fell upon his passion like drops of ice.

He let her hand go and turned away, looking down at the water that flowed beneath them with eyes that saw only a lost dream, a vanished vision in its muddy depths.

"Tubby, why do you care like that?" she cried. "I wish you didn't."

"I am not as light as you," he thrust at her. "I—can't stop caring all at once just because you've done so. I wish to God I could! This means another man. De Marsac, I suppose. A mincing Frenchman! Good God!"

Dido's eyes blazed. She slipped off the parapet and faced him, quivering with anger.

"This means that I have finished with you, Stuart Doran. You might at least remember that you are a gentleman, and that you are staying in my father's house."

Doran looked at her, his freckled face acutely miserable. "I don't forget that fact for an instant. I can't. You may not believe me when I tell you that sometimes his bread and salt almost choke me. He's too straight a man, too fine a man to deceive." He took a step forward and looked at her with a new resolution. "Look here, Dido, can't we start fair now? You can't have meant that you want to turn me down absolutely. Give me another chance, so that I can honestly go to your father and face him, man to man. I'm not going so badly even now. If you care, you wouldn't mind roughing it for a bit, would you? I'd work my fingers to the bone for you, Dido!" Poignant appeal rang in his tone.

Dido looked at him very gravely and shook her head. "If I cared for you I'd willingly walk barefoot through

the world by your side," she answered slowly. "But I don't Tubby. I don't, and that's the pity of it."

"Then you really meant what you said just now?" he asked hoarsely.

"Every word of it." She looked at him inexorably. "You can't pretend that I've deceived you. I was a young idiot, I know, but—I was absolutely straight with you when we parted. Didn't I tell you then that it was all over?"

"You did. It hurt you to say it, though."

"Yes," she admitted. "It hurt then. It doesn't now. It is all over, and the sooner you recognize the fact the better."

"I suppose so," he answered dully. "You do hit straight from the shoulder, Dido."

"You didn't think I'd scratch, did you?" Dido asked indignantly.

"I dunno. Women do, sometimes." He looked at her in a kind of numb amazement. "What would de Marsac think of the Curly episode, I wonder?" he asked slowly.

Dido looked at him with infinite scorn.

"Tell him." she suggested. "Tell everyone in El-Armut if you're that sort of a cad!"

Doran paled and his eyes grew very bright.

"You *are* a little beast!" he said under his breath. "I don't know why I care for you as I do."

"The sooner you stop the better pleased I shall be. Here, let's have no more of this idiotic squabbling. Pull yourself together, Tubby. Heloise is coming across the terrace."

Mrs. Waring glided a moment later up to two bored young people who were throwing stones and morsels of cement at a cork floating by on the water.

"Good morning, children. You don't look as if you

were enjoying yourselves," she said pleasantly, putting up her parasol to shield her complexion from the sun.

"We're not," Dido confessed. "Tubby is frightfully bored because Pam has gone in and left me to entertain him."

"That's a tribute to Pamela's powers of attraction, but rather a slight to yours, Dido dear. If I were you, Mr. Doran, I should not show my boredom quite so plainly."

"Wouldn't you?" asked Doran with inward rage.

"No." She lowered her voice a little. "I am not joking, Mr. Doran. If you wear your heart on your sleeve so very openly people will begin to talk."

"Let them," said Doran, turning away and walking towards the house.

"Decidedly a *farouche* young man, my Dido. I wonder what dear Pamela sees in him?"

CHAPTER XXVIII

HELOISE SAYS HER SAY

IT was not until after the homeward journey from the Barrage that Langrishe had an opportunity of putting his second intention into action.

The party came and went on trollies, which were propelled by Arabs on miniature railway-lines along the river-bank to where the Barrage works began.

Langrishe and Heloise Waring were on the first of the return trollies. When they alighted Langrishe looked around for the rest of the party, but they were nowhere in sight.

"Something must have happened to delay them," he said. "We won't wait. Let us stroll slowly homewards. They'll probably overtake us."

"Does it matter if they do not?" asked Mrs. Waring, opening her parasol and holding it over her shoulder, not because the fierceness of the swiftly declining sun called for any such shield, but because it made a becoming background for her creamy-white skin, and beautifully waved hair. "With such a crowd of gay young people we maturer ones scarcely ever get a chance of a quiet talk."

"As it happens, that is just what I want to have with you, Heloise."

"Yes?" Her pulses quickened slightly. Was her dream coming true? Was he going to turn to her for sympathy, for comprehension, having found his gauche

young wife inadequate? Ah, the pity of it! Her heart swelled with the sympathy which she was ready to shower upon him.

Langrishe, as usual, went straight to the point.

"You said something—insinuated something last night which I didn't quite understand, Heloise."

"I?" She opened her rain-grey eyes in astonishment. "My dear Damer, I never insinuated anything. I am almost too blunt sometimes, I fear. As you ought to know by this time, I have a perfect passion for the truth."

"So have I. I could never again trust anyone whom I once found out in a lie."

"Isn't that perhaps just a little bit—drastic?"

"Perhaps. But that's how I feel about such things." He stopped abruptly.

"What did you think I insinuated, dear old friend? Surely, of all people in the world, you know that I would speak openly to you," Heloise said.

"I should hope so. You were saying something about young Doran." He paused again. The thing was more difficult to put into words, now that he faced it in broad daylight.

"About Mr. Doran?"

Heloise thrilled to the situation. Damer could not blame her if he forced the truth from her. It would be cruel to leave him in his fool's paradise any longer than was necessary. People would soon begin to talk about the young man's patient infatuation for Pamela, if they were not doing so already. Rumours would inevitably reach Langrishe's ears sooner or later, and then he might in justice ask why she, his old friend, had not warned him. There are circumstances in which blindness may be more of a crime than folly. Surely this was one of them. To condone a crime is to participate therein.

She, Heloise Waring, had never shirked what she knew to be her duty. She was not going to begin to do so now.

She hesitated for a moment before she spoke.

"Well, Damer, my dear, Mr. Doran is a fellow-guest in your house. It is difficult for me to say anything which——"

"Do you know anything against him?" Langrishe cut across her hesitations.

"I—I have heard of an episode in his career——"

"Does it make him unfit to associate with my wife and daughter?"

"Well, knowing the laxity of men in general, I scarcely——"

"I am not lax where they are concerned," answered Langrishe curtly. "Please tell me what you know about this—episode, Heloise."

"Very little," she conceded, with a sense of relief. Probably there was really nothing in it. A mere holiday affair, week or a week-end with a pretty girl at a Cornish village."

"Were they living together openly?" asked Langrishe.

"I know no details. They were obviously lovers, though, my informant told me."

"Who was your informant?"

"Nobody you know. A London friend who was seeing me off at Victoria and recognized Mr. Doran as the youth of the affair. Don't look so black, Damer dear. He surely is not the only young man of your acquaintance who has had a holiday under the rose like that."

"No—but—are you sure that it wasn't some woman who had got hold of him and was making a fool of the lad?"

Heloise regretfully shook her head. "I'm afraid not. My informant said the girl was quite young and quite

pretty. She looked a lady, too, she said, not——”

Langrishe frowned. The story had a savour about it which he did not like. He had grown quite attached to Doran. He had believed him to be clean and straight as himself. It was rather a jar to find that he had so recently played a part in an evidently illicit love-affair. He did not like the thought of his being so closely associated with Pamela and Dido after that, not that he would—that couldn’t have been what he was confiding in Pam that evening in the firelight? No, those weren’t the sort of affairs about which one told one’s women-folk.

“Damer, I thought you were a man of the world,” Mrs. Waring said playfully, as he strode along by her side, his eyes shining fiercely under his tufted brows. “You make too much of this.”

They had reached the garden, and, by common consent, turned their steps to the terrace walk by the river.

“I am a man of the world, I hope. But it’s on account of Pam and Dido,” he paused uncomfortably.

“Perhaps Pamela knows something about this affair,” suggested Mrs. Waring pleasantly.

“Why should Pam know anything about it?”

“She’s such an old friend of Mr. Doran’s. Besides, she was in Cornwall last summer. She told me so herself. She might possibly have run across him there. If you are so worried about it why not ask her if she could throw any light on the subject?” Mrs. Waring’s heart was beating a little faster than usual, though she had quite persuaded herself that she was only fulfilling a rather disagreeable duty.

“The idea is absurd,” said Langrishe bluntly.

Mrs. Waring shifted her parasol slightly before she asked, with a tender poignance:

"Damer, dear old friend, are you really blind, or are you only pretending to be?"

Langrishe wheeled round to face her.

"In God's name what are you driving at?" he cried, stung to sudden exasperation.

Once the words were spoken she would have given anything to recall them, but having left her lips they went echoing down the void throughout eternity, planting their barb as they went.

"I only mean, is it possible that you haven't seen what is patent to everybody?" she answered uncomfortably.

"Please explain yourself, Heloise. What have I overlooked that is so patent to everybody?"

"Can't you guess? Why do you pain me by making me say such things?" she cried.

"Why do you madden me by beating about the bush like this?" he retorted. "I feel as if I were being muffled in a fog of evasions. Can't you speak out?"

She bent her head as to his will.

"Very well, if you will have it so, but remember it was you who asked for it. Have you never noticed that poor young Doran is madly in love with Pamela?"

"In love with Pamela? Tosh!" cried Langrishe, in angry incredulity.

"My poor Damer, it is not tosh, it is only too true."

"I don't believe a word of it. Why, he and Pam——"

"Please spare me the platitude about their being like brother and sister. I have heard that sort of thing until I am really tired of it."

"Then this is what you were trying to hint last night?" said Langrishe slowly.

"Yes. I wanted to give you a word of friendly warning not to encourage the young man to come here too

much. I did not mean to put it into such crude words as you have forced me to do."

"Crude words are best fitted for crude things," said Langrishe slowly. "You tell me that Doran is in love with Pamela. Will you please say what grounds you have for making such a statement?"

"You—you press me very hard, Damer. Won't a hint suffice you?"

"No!" The monosyllable cracked like a pistol-shot. "The truth, please, as you're such a stickler for it, Heloise."

"My one desire is to save you pain, dear Damer."

His eyebrows met.

"Save me pain?" he echoed. "How can it cause me pain to hear that the poor chap is in love with Pamela? It may cause him pain, but not me. Why, I admire his taste! I'm in love with Pamela myself?"

Mrs. Waring gasped almost as if he had struck her. What a savage he was! Nearly as *farouche* as poor Tim Doran himself! So unappreciative of all the delicate *nuances* of the friendship she offered him. Well, he should have thrust for thrust. Her vision vanished; she would not spare him now.

With a pale smile she reminded him.

"My poor friend, have you forgotten the call of youth to youth? You were husband and father when Pamela was in the schoolroom. I have not one word to say against the dear girl herself. She tries to do her duty nobly, but—I have eyes in my head, Damer. I saw their parting on the *Syria*. I saw the poor child's confusion at the mere mention of his name. I see every moment their evident absorption in each other, and I beg you, Damer, as one of your oldest friends, not to throw them so constantly together."

"Are you trying to tell me now that Pamela is in love with Doran?" asked Langrishe, with an ominous quietness.

Heloise Waring hesitated.

"I am not trying to tell you anything. I merely give you a word of warning. You can take it for what it's worth."

"I do take it for what it's worth," said Langrishe very low. "You mean kindly, no doubt, Heloise, but if you think that Pam is in love with Doran, all I can say is that it's a damned lie!"

"It's just like you to think so," murmured Mrs. Waring, with a gentle disregard for his violent language. "I don't want to disenchant you, my dear. I would merely suggest that you keep your eyes open, and cast back in your memory to see if you can recall anything that bears out what I say. Ah, here are the others!"

Pamela, followed by Doran, came quickly through the French window of the drawing-room, and crossed the terrace towards them.

To the two who scrutinized them closely their faces looked pale and drawn.

"Instant confirmation of what I was saying," thought Mrs. Waring, with a little thrill of triumph.

Pamela went straight up to her husband.

"I'm sure you were wondering what was keeping us? Were you anxious?"

"No. I knew you were in good hands!" His words were toneless, his eyes watchful. "Where's Dido?"

"She's gone up to her room. We had an adventure, Damer. Dido very nearly trod on a snake on the embankment. Only M. de Marsac pulled it away in time, or she would have done so. She's all right, my dear. She wasn't bitten. Poor M. de Marsac was, though."

"Was it a harmless variety?" asked Langrishe quickly.

"No, it wasn't, sir," put in Doran. "It was a poisonous brute."

"Where is de Marsac? What did they do?"

"Marshall, who knows a lot about such bites, cauterized it at once, and sent for a native doctor Johnnie hot-foot. I thought it better to bring the girls home. I'm going over again and see how he is."

"I'll go with you," said Langrishe promptly, relieved at the thought of action. "He probably saved the little girl's life. I must thank him at once, and if there's any nursing to be done, he must come here."

"He can have my room," said Doran quickly.

"Why, you can't get back to Tahta to-night, man."

"No, but I'm sure the Durrants would give me a shake-down for the night."

"Oh, nonsense," said Langrishe hospitably. "We can't have you running off like that."

"I told the trolley boys to wait."

"Good. We'll be off then."

"Don't be long, Damer. We shall be anxious to know about M. de Marsac. If you bring him back with you I can have a bed put up in your dressing-room for Tim."

Langrishe looked at her keenly. How could anyone read anything in that dear face but truth and a crystal sincerity? Ignoring Heloise Waring, he stopped to kiss her before he went.

"Run in and rest, dear. You look as if you had got a fright. If de Marsac is allowed to come I'll bring him back at once."

"It was poor Dido who got the worst fright," said Pamela. "I must go to her."

"I wonder if she'd like to see me?" put in Mrs. Waring.

"She probably won't want anybody, but I must just see if there's anything she needs. You'll excuse me, won't you?" She turned towards the house.

"Oh, I'm coming in, too. We were only waiting here for you."

"I'm sorry we were delayed," said Pamela, with an effort at politeness, "but you see how it was."

"Yes. I quite see how it was," Mrs. Waring answered, with a curious little emphasis.

"You had Damer to entertain you, so you were all right."

"On this occasion it was I who was entertaining him," returned Mrs. Waring, with a sub-acid sweetness.

"It is such a pleasure to him to have you here," Pamela went on innocently. "And to me, too," she added, fearing a lack of warmth on her own part. "It's true in a way," she assured herself. "Sure, anything that gives him pleasure pleases me, too."

She tapped at Dido's door and opened it at a listless: "Come in!"

The girl was sitting on the edge of her bed, her hands clasped between her knees. She had thrown off her hat, but had made no other change. She looked up dully at Pamela's entrance.

"I shall never forgive myself if he dies," she said tonelessly.

Pamela sat down on the bed next her and put an arm round the drooping shoulders.

"But he's not going to die, you goose," she said cheerily. "Mr. Marshall assured us that it wasn't a deadly snake at all."

"It looked deadly enough—ugh!" The girl shuddered.

"And they hustled him off quickly enough for anything."

"Don't you know that snake-bite has got to be treated at once, before the poison has time to get into the blood? Their prompt action has probably saved him a lot of suffering."

"What did they do, Pam?"

"Cauterized the wound, Tim said, and gave him brandy, and sent at once for the old *hakim*!"

"I wonder what the *hakim* will say? Do you believe in these native doctors, Pam?"

"They ought to know more about snake-biting than Englishmen," Pamela assured her. "Haven't Eastern physicians always been noted for their skill?"

"Have they?" said Dido, her sweet little white face slackening from its mask of tragedy.

"Buck up, Dido. Your father has gone to the Barrage with Tim to hear the doctor's report, and if he allows it, will bring M. de Marsac back with him."

Dido sprang to her feet, as if suddenly re-charged with vitality.

"Dad's a lamb! Do you think he'll come, Pam? Where will you put him if he does. Is there anything I can do?"

"Nothing for the present. I'll give him Tim's room, and put up a camp bed for Tim in Damer's dressing-room."

"Pam, you're a jewel! How do you think of these things?"

Pamela smiled, pleased at her success.

"Long years of practice in Ireland," she said. "Hurry and change now, and be downstairs when your dad gets back."

One of Dido's prettiest frocks was already unhooked from its peg before the door had closed on Pamela.

To her disappointment her father and Doran returned as they went, alone.

"Well, Dad, how is he?" Dido asked breathlessly. "You haven't brought him back with you after all."

"No, little girl. When we got to the Barrage we found that the old *hakim* had taken him home with him. He's rather a pal of de Marsac's, it seems, and he is supposed to know all that is to be known about snake-bites, so the poor chap is in good hands."

"Does the *hakim* think he'll—he'll——"

"He guarantees to cure him in a few days if he isn't interfered with. That's why he carried him off to his own house."

"I'm sorry he couldn't come here," said Dido, after a pause, trying to keep all that she felt out of her voice.

"So am I," returned Langrishe warmly. "I'd like to do something for him after what he did for you, my darling." Moved out of his usual calm, he drew the girl towards him and kissed her. "I can't bear to think of what might have happened, child," he said huskily.

Dido stood where he had left her, thinking deeply.

At her father's news of de Marsac, she had an instant vision of one of the tall secret-looking houses in the town, perhaps the house with the *mushrabiyyeh* shutters, from whence had come the high voice of the singer and the pulse of the tambourine. She clenched her hands at the thought. In imagination she saw de Marsac tended by some snowy-veiled beauty, whose dark eyes would cast a spell upon him in his weakness. She heard the high voice sing to him, saw the bare hand beat upon the taut skin of the tambourine, the liquid eyes look from beneath fringed lids for his applause; and the rare, painful red flooded her face, neck, and brow.

For the first time in her young life she knew jealousy,

and found it, as the Wise One says, "*cruel as the grave.*"

It would have stilled her smart had she realized that de Marsac would probably never even catch a glimpse of the womenkind of the *hakim's* house; that such houris as she pictured existed chiefly in her own imagination, and that even if any such dwelt in the *harim* of the old doctor, they would be kept in rigid seclusion during the *Feransâwi's* visit.

But she did not know this, so Jealousy, that "hydra of calamity," seized upon her, each of its ugly heads more suggestive and repulsive than the last.

Doran, coming downstairs, saw her still standing in the hall. His pulses quickened at the thought of a word alone with her, but when a bend in the staircase brought her face into view, he turned abruptly, and went back to his own room.

CHAPTER XXIX

LANGRISHE ASKS QUESTIONS

"PAM, were you in Cornwall last summer?"

"No, Damer, I was at home. Why?"

"Heloise said that you told her you were there."

Pamela looked round from the mirror before which she was doing her hair for dinner.

"I did not, indeed."

"She says you did."

"Ah, then maybe I did, after all," said Pamela, remembering suddenly. "But I didn't mean this past summer. I meant *last* summer—the one before this."

"It sounds rather involved, but I think I understand. Where were you staying?"

"With the Blairs at Penzance. I was at school with Maisie Blair, you know."

"I don't, but that doesn't matter. Did you run across Doran by any chance, when you were there?"

"Across Tim, is it? I never saw sight nor sign of him. Why do you ask?" she said again.

"Because—well, I heard rather an unpleasant thing about him this afternoon, Pam." He spoke with obvious reluctance.

Pamela turned to face him, surprised, her brush suspended in action.

"An unpleasant thing about Tim?" she cried. "What on earth was it, Damer?"

Swiftly her mind rushed to the thought of his secret

friendship with Dido. Could it possibly be that? Could Damer have heard of it? Would he refer to it, if so, as an unpleasant affair. He might. That sort of clandestine meeting would lower his ideal of his womenfolk. She felt a quick thankfulness that she knew the truth of the whole matter. She would be able to assure him that it was more a mere youthful folly than an actual wilful deception. She might, perhaps, modify his rather rigid point of view, widen his narrowness.

"He was living with a girl in Cornwall last summer," Langrishe put the truth badly.

Pamela's brush dropped with a clatter.

"Living with a girl? What girl?" she faltered, palping.

A horrible suspicion suddenly seized her. What if the "passages" so lightly referred to by Dido had been of deeper import than she pretended? What if the girl were—— Ah, no! Pamela caught herself up with a jerk, reddening furiously, as she stooped to pick up her brush. Such a suspicion was as unworthy of her as it was of Dido. It shamed them both.

"I don't know," Langrishe returned, to her secret relief. "That's just the bare facts as it was told me."

"Who told you, Damer?"

"Heloise Waring."

"How in the world did she hear about it?" asked Pamela in astonishment. "I didn't think she and Tim ever met before they travelled together in the boat train."

"They didn't. A friend who was seeing her off at Victoria recognized Doran as the hero of the Cornish episode, and told Heloise about it."

"Why couldn't she mind her own business? Did she say what sort the girl was?" asked Pamela rather breathlessly.

"Quite young, quite pretty, and quite a lady. Not—the other kind."

"Was she dark or fair?"

"Heloise didn't say. Why do you ask, Pam? Have you any idea who the girl could be?"

"Indeed, I have not. How could I possibly have, Damer?" cried Pamela, with what seemed to him rather unnecessary vehemence.

"It wasn't—he wasn't confiding in you about that affair the other night when he came down from Tahta. The night I—" he stopped abruptly. To finish the sentence—"the night I found you together in the fire-light with your hand on his knee and your eyes wet"—would savour too much of an accusation; or at least so it seemed to him in his present perturbed state of mind.

"Oh, no." Pamela assured him, with the same undue emphasis. "It wasn't that at all. It wasn't, indeed, Damer."

"What was he telling you that night, Pam?"

Pamela hesitated, but only for an instant. She must tell him the truth as far as she could without betraying Tim's confidence. She sought for words.

"He was telling me how unhappy he was, because—because he cared for someone who—who could never care for him."

"Was that all?"

"That was all."

"Pam, do you know who that someone is?"

"I'm afraid I do," Pamela answered with averted face, her voice little more than a whisper.

"Can you tell me?"

"I'm afraid I can't, Damer. It's—it's his secret, not mine."

"I understand," said Langrishe gravely. "Of course, you can't give him away. Thank you, my dear, for being frank with me." He moved rather heavily towards his dressing-room.

CHAPTER XXX

"MEMORIES"

"SURE, aren't I always frank with you, Damer?" she called after him. "There's nothing in the world you could ask me that I wouldn't tell you, except——"

"Except?" he turned to her.

"Except another person's secret," answered Pamela proudly. "Sure, you know that."

"Yes," he said slowly, his hand on the door.

She ran to him and put hers over it. She could not bear to have even the faintest shadow between them.

"You do know that, don't you, Damer?"

"I do, my dear," he answered, after a scarcely perceptible pause.

He went into his dressing-room pursued by one insistent thought.

Heloise had been right, after all. In spite of the summer episode Doran was in love with Pamela now. Perhaps he had always cared for her, and that Cornish affair had merely been undertaken as a sort of cure. Men did that sort of thing, he knew. Sometimes it worked and sometimes it didn't. In this case it would not appear to have done so.

"Cast your memory back!" Heloise had advised him.

That was not difficult. He threw his net into the immediate past and drew out proof after proof of Mrs. Waring's suggestion.

Pam's sadness at Doran's confession of his hopeless love, her ready blush at the mention of his name, her

staunch defence of the poor chap's secret, her refusal to tell even him who the girl was, all pointed to the one inevitable conclusion.

There was no one else for it to be, after all. Doran and Dido scarcely even spoke to one another, and then only in the most ordinary fashion, while the fellow was forever dangling after Pam, talking to her, playing tennis with her, seeking her out on every possible occasion.

Hang it all! Doran was eating his bread and salt! He might have the decency to keep away from his wife. Langrishe tied his tie crookedly at the thought.

Then common honesty forced him to admit that he had never seen anything in Doran's manner towards either Pamela or himself at which he could conscientiously cavil.

"The chap's a straight chap," he assured himself. "Confound these cackling women! Why can't they let well alone?"

Pamela, after her own fashion, relieved her feelings by shaking a clenched fist at Mrs. Waring's door as she went downstairs.

"Oh, then, that you mightn't!" she murmured cryptically.

Dido had vanished from the hall, and only Doran was in the drawing-room when she entered. He came forward to meet her and put a hand on her shoulder.

"Look here, Pam," he said, in rather a hard tone. "I'm going to cut and run. I can't stick this any longer."

"Can't you?" answered Pamela gently. "I was afraid you were being hurt, my poor old boy."

"I am. Damnably! So that's that?" he returned, with a rather ghastly effort at a grin. "I see now that I haven't an earthly, Pam, so I'd better get back to work first thing. You won't mind if I don't come here as often as I used."

"I will, indeed," said Pamela frankly. "But I only want whatever is best for yourself, Timsy. Why do you think you haven't a chance? I was hoping——"

"Because she told me so herself. Oh, she didn't mince matters, I can assure you. She didn't even leave a loophole for a hope to wriggle through. I had it straight from the shoulder in plainest black and white—if you don't mind a mixed metaphor, Pam——"

"I do not," said Pamela slowly. Then she looked searchingly at him. "There's one thing I want to ask you, Tim. Why should you think now that you might have a chance, when you knew all along that she never really cared for you?"

"Never really cared for me?" Doran's face grew red and his eyes almost disappeared in his astonishment. "What makes you think that, Pam? Why, last summer she cared as much as I did! We were simply mad about each other. That was why I felt it couldn't really be over, that I might even have half a chance."

"Last summer?" Pamela repeated, biting her lip. "Where were you last summer?"

"Oh, just knocking round," answered Doran uncomfortably. "She *did* care then, Pam."

"If so, when and why did—the affair end? Why didn't you wait for each other? Why did you break it off so utterly?"

"It wasn't my doing," Doran protested passionately. "I'd have waited for ever for her, but she wouldn't have it. She said, very truly, that I had no money and no prospects, and that we were both so young we'd get over it soon, that it wouldn't hurt for long, and that we'd both probably be very thankful some day, and realize how wise she had been."

"You probably will," said Pamela. "Though it's

hard to believe it now. Dido is not the girl for you, Tim. I don't think she'd ever make you really happy."

Doran moved impatiently. He was too young and too sore still to realize that Time numbs most pains, no matter how sharp they are. Who looks upon Time as a benefactor, especially in the morning of life?"

"I could have made her care for me in time, if only—" he stopped.

"If only what, Tim dear?"

"If only another chap hadn't come inside me."

"What other chap?"

"De Marsac." Enmity rang in his tone.

"Oh, Tim, what makes you think that?"

"I don't think it. I know it. Have you never watched her face when he's near her? It changes absolutely. Her very voice changes. Nothing he does or says escapes her. It's the same with him—damn him!"

"Hush, Timsy. Curses come home to roost. Are you sure of this?"

"Is a fellow sure of what makes him suffer absolute hell?"

For a moment she had a glimpse of misery that appalled her. She had not dreamed that the light-hearted, happy-go-lucky Tim could feel like that.

"Oh, my dear, I am sorry," she said, with quick sympathy. "If this is true, indeed you mustn't come here again. I can't have you hurt like this. Don't tell anyone else what you have just told me, Tim. Damer mustn't know. It would worry him dreadfully."

"I must apologize for interrupting a *tête-à-tête*," said a smooth voice behind them. "I didn't mean to listen, but I could not help overhearing your little appeal to Mr. Doran, dear Pamela."

Pamela turned, disconcerted, to see Mrs. Waring just

behind her, fair and statuesque in filmy black draperies, above whose folds her beautiful shoulders and well-modelled head rose with almost classical effect.

Completely mistress of the situation, she looked smilingly from one confused face to the other.

"I confess that I'm devoured with curiosity to know what it is that must be kept from Damer. What it is that would worry him so dreadfully if he knew it. Won't you admit me to your conspiracy of silence?"

Doran cast a glance of mute appeal to Pamela. Reddening slightly, she blurted out the truth.

"It's something about M. de Marsac."

"Ah! Is he worse?"

"No! He will be all right in a few days, the doctor thinks."

"What is it, then?" She fixed her grey eyes coldly on Pamela to check her futile temporizing.

"Tim thinks he admires Dido," said Pamela reluctantly. Heloise Waring raised her eyebrows.

"But why should Damer object to that? All the young men are crazy about the dear child," she said pleasantly. Then she added, looking pointedly at Doran: "With one exception."

"Perhaps I'm not as great an exception as you think," muttered Doran.

"Dear Mr. Doran!" Heloise Waring raised incredulous brows and smiled dubiously as Dido drifted in from the terrace, pale and chill as a frosted leaf, just as Langrishe entered by the door.

To herself she thought: "They are very clumsy fools. They can't even lie convincingly! Poor Damer!"

CHAPTER XXXI

TANGLING THREADS

"I'm afraid I shan't be down again for some time, sir," said Doran next morning, in bidding farewell to his host. "It's been most awfully jolly, but I must chuck play for a bit now and work."

"Right," answered Langrishe, without any protest. "There's nothing like work. It won't do any harm to stick to it for a while." He gave his hand a warm grip. Poor young chap, it was hard lines on him, but he'd soon get over it, if he gritted his teeth and sweated at his job for a while. "It's a man's work, Doran, and worth doing."

"It is," Doran assented. Then he said a little awkwardly. "I'm rather a rotter at saying things, sir, but I just can't tell you how grateful I am to you and—and Pam for being so ripping to me."

"That's all right, my dear chap," said Langrishe, a little gruffly. "You'll always be welcome there, Doran, though, mind you, I think you're wise to stay away for a bit."

Doran looked at him quickly, almost eagerly.

"You know?" he breathed.

Langrishe nodded.

"I'm glad you do, sir," said the young man simply. "Your bread and salt, you know——" He wrung Langrishe's hand and ran down the steps.

His own words! Bread and salt; the Eastern symbols

of friendship and loyalty. Langrishe turned back into the house, conscious of a sense of relief. The lad was a decent lad. His judgment of men was not at fault, after all. Whatever the boy's past follies might have been, at least, he was running straight now. It wasn't his fault that he loved Pam. Who could help loving her, if it came to that? Langrishe's heart swelled at the thought of his wife and his own unprecedented luck. Their marriage, entered into so lightly, was turning out one of the rarely successful ventures. How was it that she cared so much for him? In spite of his disclaimer to Heloise, fourteen years disparity did mean a big gap, so wide that nothing but love could bridge it. Pam had thrown her plank across, he had thrown his. Thank God, they reached and held, leading to unimaginable joys.

On the face of it, Doran was more her mate than he, Langrishe's mind told him. The call of youth to youth was strong, and not to be disdained. But his heart cried out denial. Pamela was his, his mate, and no other's. No matter how many years lay between them, they were near in spirit. They were one, he and she, and Time, binding his sheaf of days, would but draw them closer and closer to each other. He felt a great pity, a real sympathy for poor young Doran, as he went off to his day's work, whistling tunelessly.

Pamela had had what the French call a white night; a very different experience from that kindly Arab wish—"a night as white as milk."

Her broken sleep was haunted by vague fears, ugly, half-formed suspicions. She wished with all her heart that Mrs. Waring had kept her sordid little scandal to herself. What on earth did she want to tell it to Damer for?

Pamela knew that men were not saints. She knew that

such episodes were not uncommon, but she could not believe such a thing about Tim Doran; Tim, madly in love for months, as she knew him to be, with another girl! Was it likely that he would go straight from Dido to some illicit intrigue—last summer. “Last summer she cared as much as I did. We were simply mad about each other.”

Last summer! Last summer!

The words buzzed in her head with the persistence of mosquitoes.

Oh, how she wished that that mischief-making woman had not repeated her horrid story! There was no necessity for her to have told Damer. The thing was over and done with. Why need she have raked it up?

It was well for Pamela’s comparative peace of mind that she had no idea of the deeper implications of Heloise Waring’s tale. Of her secret enmity towards herself she was subconsciously aware, but she never dreamed that she could carry it so far as to try deliberately to sow seeds of suspicion in Damer’s mind. Nor had she the faintest idea that Damer could possibly imagine her to be the object of poor Tim’s hopeless passion.

Loyal to the core, such a suspicion would be, to Pamela, utterly impossible of conception. It was Dido alone who occupied her broken waking thoughts. Dido and the pricking puzzle of “last summer” that loomed before her so portentously with all the magnifying effect which night has upon even the smallest worries.

It was no wonder that she was pale and heavy-eyed in the morning, no wonder that her conversation seemed a little flat, her geniality a trifled forced.

Her quiet “Good-bye and good luck, Tim,” had not the power to blot out Dido’s valedictory.

“Cheerio, Tubby old thing. Mind you bring me a

stuffed crocodile the next time you come down," which rang in Doran's ears mockingly, a fitting funeral dirge to what she had made of their idyll.

Langrishe's sparse farewell, with its nod of understanding; braced him like a tonic after it.

"That's a man, if you like," he thought to himself. "Pam's a lucky girl!"

Had he known what was really in his host's mind he might have wondered at a force of character even greater than that with which he had credited him; but naturally, nothing could have been more remote from his thoughts.

He had no more idea than Pamela of the insidious suspicions which Mrs. Waring was endeavouring to instil into Langrishe's mind. He would have hated her even more than he did if he had.

A long day loomed in front of Pamela when the men had gone. Nothing was planned for their remaining guest's amusement. Dido, in her present, withdrawn mood, did not seem likely to be of much use as entertainer.

A servant who had been sent to inquire for de Marsac, brought back the news that the Effendi was progressing favourably.

This ascertained, the day's excitement was over for Dido. She wandered aimlessly from room to room, settling to nothing, played the piano for a little, strolled out on the terrace, sat on the parapet smoking innumerable cigarettes.

At last Pamela felt impelled to intervene.

"Come here, Dido," she called from the drawing-room window. "You'll turn into a chimney if you smoke so many cigarettes."

"What does it matter?" said Dido listlessly, tossing her cigarette away.

"You'll realize how much it matters when you've spoilt your complexion," Pamela warned her.

"Stupid old Mammy Pam! Can't I paint?"

"No, you can't," said Pamela shortly. "But I'll tell you what you can do."

"What's that?"

"Think of some way of entertaining Mrs. Waring for the afternoon. I'm stumped!"

"My dear Pam, I tell you for the umpteenth time that you take too much trouble over our Louisa. Let her entertain herself for once. She's quite capable of it."

"I dare say, but it seems rude to one's guest——"

"Tosh!" returned Dido tersely. "Look here, Pam, let's rest to-day. I feel a bit done, somehow. I got rather a fright yesterday—about M. de Marsac, I mean. Whatever we do will seem flat after the excitement of Christmas, so let's do nothing. You look as if you wanted a rest, too. You're not at your best and brightest this morning, my little stepmother."

"I know. I didn't sleep very well last night," Pamela admitted.

"Aha! A bad conscience?"

"No, it was not."

"What was it, then?" Dido plumped Pamela into a big chair and perched herself on the arm of it. "Out with your guilty secrets, Mammy Pam. Louisa won't be down for another hour."

Pamela looked up at the girl in astonishment. Except for a little pucker between her eyebrows, which she knew was caused by anxiety about de Marsac, Dido's tone and attitude were absolutely care-free. Should she speak frankly to her about what was worrying her, and scotch her tormenting doubts once and for all? She might not have such another propitious opportunity for days. With

all her heart she wanted to put the thing behind her, to have done with it. Tim was gone. She did not know when she would see him again, but Dido was here, and in a softened mood. She determined to plunge.

"The guilty secrets aren't mine," she said quietly. "They concern poor Tim."

"Tubby? What about him?" cried Dido, on a sharpened note. "I thought he was safely in Tahta by this, and that we weren't going to be bothered any more with him."

"You're not very kind about him, Dido."

"Why should I be kind about him?"

"You haven't been altogether frank with me, either."

"What do you mean?"

"You let me think that the caring was all on his side."

Dido peered down at her.

"Who told you it wasn't?"

"Tim himself."

Dido gave a stifled exclamation.

"He told me that you were mad about each other last summer. Those were his very words," Pamela continued inflexibly.

"Good words, too," muttered Dido savagely. "I must have taken leave of my senses to imagine that I cared for him."

"Why did you pretend to me that you didn't?"

Dido swung an angry foot to and fro.

"I dunno! Perhaps because it seems so impossible now to believe I ever did!"

"Why is it so impossible now?"

"Pam, you're boring. You know how I hate being questioned," exclaimed Dido angrily.

"I can't help that. We've gone so far now that this

thing has got to be cleared. I lay awake half the night thinking about it."

"More fool you!" said Dido rudely, jumping off the chair. "I can't imagine why you worried about what doesn't concern you."

"But it does concern me, Dido," cried Pamela reproachfully. "Aren't I very fond of you, and don't I stand in the place of your mother to you? I'd do anything in the world I could for you, child, but there must be truth between us if I am to be of any use to you."

"*Are* you to be of any use to me?" said Dido flippantly.

"It doesn't seem so. I'm sorry," answered Pamela tonelessly.

She rose from her chair, but before she could move to leave the room, Dido rushed at her, caught her by the arms and pushed her down on the seat again.

"No, no, no, Pam! You mustn't go away in a huff. I'm a little beast, I know. Even poor Tubby said so, but in my heart I don't really mean to be nasty to you. Do forgive me, Mammy Pam, and I'll tell you anything—anything you like." She knelt in front of the chair, leaning her arms on Pamela's knees.

Pamela looked at her for a moment dispiritedly.

"Maybe you'll invent things."

"No, I won't," Dido's face cleared. "I am really rather a truthful person in spite of appearances."

"But you laugh at everything."

"It is my nature, I can't help that. Tell me what you want to know, Pam, and I'll answer any questions you like."

"Honest Injun?"

"Honest Injun."

"Very well, then." Having got her concession, Pamela hesitated, wondering how to frame her question without

antagonizing the girl. The direct method appealed most to her own frank nature. She had had enough of hints and evasions. She thrust now for the bare truth.

"Dido," she said very quietly, looking down into the big, dark eyes turned up to her, "were you in Cornwall with Tim last summer?"

Dido sprang to her feet, her face sharpening, her eyes dilating with fear.

"My God, who told you about that?"

Pamela rose too, and faced her, her mind in a whirl.

"It *was* you, then?"

"It was." Dido's breath came in quick pants. "But how did you hear about it? Did—did he tell you? Oh, I could kill him if he did!"

"You mean Tim? No, he never said a word about it. Tim's a gentleman, Dido."

The quiet rebuke passed the girl by unheeded. She looked round the room as if for some way of escape. She reminded Pamela, as she faced her resentfully, of a little wild cat she had once found in a trap—a fierce, beautiful little creature, all teeth and claws, even for its rescuer.

Pamela felt a sudden pity well within her. Dido was very young, very spoilt. She had never really known a mother's care, never shared the rough and tumble, the give and take of a large family. She was entirely self-willed, self-centred; she had done what she pleased all her life; plucked her stolen fruit, it seemed, without ever realizing what bitter seeds it might bear.

Pamela went up to where she stood, glaring at her, and put an arm round the slight shoulders.

Dido drew away.

"Don't touch me. I hate being touched."

"Very well, I won't, then." Pamela stifled a sigh. "Come and sit down on the couch and tell me all about it."

"Why should I?" the girl cried angrily. "You've pried and spied and found things out for yourself. Why should I tell you any more?"

"Oh, Dido. I haven't pried and spied, and indeed, didn't at all want to find out anything about you. It was only when Mrs. Waring told your father, and he told me—"

"Heloise told Dad about me?" said Dido, paling and clasping her hands to her breast.

To Pamela's half-pitying, half-searching gaze, the girl seemed to shrink within herself.

"No, no," she answered quickly. "Neither of them knows it was you."

A shudder passed over Dido's whole figure. She gave a sigh that shook her like a reed.

"Thank God for that!" she breathed, closing her eyes. The little, pale, pointed face looked like a death-mask of an elf, Pamela thought pitifully; something primitive and pagan, not an ordinary mortal girl.

"Come here, Dido," she said again, a tender inflection in her voice. "I'll tell you all I know."

Slowly Dido opened her eyes and crossed to the couch where Pamela sat, sinking down listlessly beside her.

"Who told Heloise?" she asked, when Pamela had ended her brief recital.

"Some woman who was seeing her off at Victoria, who recognized Tim. Some woman who had seen him—and the girl—in Cornwall."

Dido drew a long breath.

"And I thought it was all dead and buried—dead and buried!" she said, raising her hands and letting them fall again in her lap. "Now I think I'd better tell you my version of the story."

"I think you had, my dear," said Pamela gravely, wondering what she was about to hear.

XXXII

DIDO'S STORY

"THERE'S nothing in it, really," said Dido, after a pause.

"I can't make a three-act drama of it, Pam, nor even a Grand Guignol thriller."

She stopped and stared in front of her, as if she were looking down into some pool of the past, which held her secret mirrored therein.

"Suppose you tell me," Pamela suggested gently, sending up a wordless prayer for wisdom in dealing with this girl, who, after all, was not so very much younger than herself.

"Oh, I was a prize idiot!" Dido answered slowly, heaving a long sigh. Then she gave her shoulders a little shake, as if she threw off some burden which was oppressing her, and looked from her end of the couch to where Pamela sat, waiting to hear what she found it so difficult to put into words. "I'll try to give you the thing in a nut shell. It's not worth expanding. To make a long story short, Tubby and I imagined ourselves in love with each other last year. It began in the spring and lasted on —until the summer. From the first I knew how it must end, and I thought he did too, but he didn't. That was the mischief of it. When Binky decided to go down to Cornwall to sketch and asked me to come too, I jumped at the idea. The Grands made no objection. You see, Binky's father is a retired general—General Bladen."

"Ah, so Miss Bladen was there, too?" cried Pamela,

in a note of heartfelt relief. "What mischief-makers people are! No one ever mentioned that fact."

"Because it was only a fact—at first," Dido admitted reluctantly. "When Tubby turned up unexpectedly, neither of us was surprised, and I was quite delighted. It really was ripping there," she continued reminiscently. "We practically lived in the water. Then the unexpected happened. Binky's stupid old father took it into his head to get ill, and she was sent for. There was a week more of our time to run. It was the tiniest place, just a handful of cottages, and a little inn to which no one ever came—so—so Tubby and I just stayed on there! We thought it was all right, that no one would ever know. No one would have known either, if only those sicken-ing people hadn't put in in their odious yacht one day."

Pamela gasped at this little glimpse of Dido's mentality.

"You thought it was all right if no one knew about it? But, Dido, didn't your own conscience tell you that it was anything but right, to stay on alone at an inn with—with your lover?"

"Haven't got a conscience. Scrapped it long ago," returned Dido, with a hard flippancy, which only half deceived her hearer. "You should be more up-to-date, Pam. There was nothing wrong in it, really."

"There was everything wrong in it," returned Pamela slowly. "I wonder at Tim. Even if you were too young and inexperienced to understand, he should have known better. He should have insisted on your leaving with Miss Bladen."

"To give him his due he did his best, but I persuaded him to stay. I could twist him round my finger, poor old Tubby. I didn't want to go back to Cheltenham, to the Grands, in that gorgeous weather, and I really didn't see

why we shouldn't take the goods the gods have given us!"

"Do you see now, Dido?"

"Yes. I see that it was rather idiotic."

"It was more than idiotic to run the risk of ruining your reputation for the sake of a week's fun," said Pamela gravely.

"You take a very stodgy view. We did nothing wrong, only ragged and played about, and had a good time."

"Who's going to believe that?"

Dido looked at her sharply. "You believe it, don't you?"

"Yes, I believe it, because I couldn't believe anything else of your father's daughter, Dido, but other people may not be so credulous. You know how censorious they can be. A young girl's reputation is as delicate as a butterfly's wing. If once you rub the bloom off it, no power on earth can put it on again."

Dido moved uneasily. "Who's going to know about it, though?"

"A good many people seem to know about it, already. You and Tim, Miss Bladen, your landlady and myself. Those know the whole truth, while half is known to your father, Mrs. Waring and that other woman, and who can tell how many more?"

"Binky doesn't know we stayed on. She left by an early morning train. We were supposed to catch a later one. The landlady doesn't know my name. She thought I was Binky's sister. She always called me Miss Bladen, and I didn't undeceive her."

"But that might injure another girl."

"There isn't another. Binky's an only daughter like myself."

Pamela sighed heavily. Was this the new morality,

to judge right or wrong by the sole standard of being found out? Had Dido no real ethical sense? Was there no chink in her armour of flippant hardness?

She did not want to wound the elusive creature. She only wanted to touch the humanity in her, to come close to the real Dido, that so persistently evaded her.

"What do you think your father would say, if he knew the truth?" She asked, after a pause.

Ah, she had found the chink now, with her bow drawn at a venture! Dido winced visibly, and leaned closer with blazing eyes.

"Pam, you couldn't be such a beast as to tell him! Promise. Swear that you won't tell him." She beat the couch with insistent little hands.

"I won't tell him," said Pamela slowly. "It would hurt him too much."

"Promise! Swear it!" urged Dido vehemently.

"I've promised once already. That ought to be enough."

"Yes, I suppose so," sighed Dido. "You've such a queer conscience, old thing."

"Why are you so desperately anxious that your father shouldn't know?" Pamela was delving for enlightenment. "Are you afraid that he wouldn't understand, wouldn't believe you, wouldn't forgive you?"

Dido reddened to one of her painful blushes.

"I rather think he wouldn't. His own women must be as Cæsar's wife, to poor old Dad. He was most archaic notions. He'd never understand. He'd probably want to insist on my marrying Tubby!"

"I'm not sure that you oughtn't to, Dido."

Dido sat up stiffly, fury in her eyes.

"You're a thousand years behind the times, Pam," she cried. "Just as old-fashioned as he is! For some

stupid notion of conventional morality you'd sacrifice my whole life by making me marry a man whom I am positively growing to dislike."

"But you loved him once."

"Tosh! A schoolgirl's infatuation, nothing more. I know now that I never really cared a pin for Tubby."

"Who has taught you that?" asked Pamela, with a flash of intuition.

Dido shot a look of contempt at her.

"Do you mean to say you don't know?"

"Is it M. de Marsac?"

"Who else could it possibly be?" countered Dido superbly.

She slipped from the couch, and stood facing Pamela.

"Haven't you, a woman, seen how it was between us? Do you really think there's another man I'd look at?"

"Oh!" cried Pamela, "I was afraid of this."

"Afraid?" echoed Dido scornfully. "Why should you be afraid?"

"I don't know that he's the man for you."

"I do. No one else may dare to judge. We are man and woman. If we choose each other, who else has the right to interfere?"

"He may be a man, but you are not a woman yet, Dido. You're barely eighteen. Not nearly old enough to know your own mind. By your own telling you were madly in love with another man six months ago!" argued Pamela.

"I wasn't. I tell you it meant nothing at all. I know that now. And I *am* a woman, with a woman's heart in a woman's body. As for love, what do you know of it, you simple creature? Why, there is more passion in my little finger than in the whole of your tall, placid body! I burn, I hunger, I thirst with love!"

"Stop, Dido! You're shameless, as well as melo-

dramatic," cried Pamela, angry at the double accusation of simplicity and inability to love. "Has M. de Marsac, then, asked you to marry him?"

Dido's fire sank as suddenly as it had flared upwards.

"No, but I know he loves me."

"Has he told you so?"

"Does one always need be told?"

"Then there is nothing really between you?" said Pamela, in a curious tone.

"There is everything in the world between us," cried Dido.

Pamela looked at her helplessly. What was she to say? "If M. de Marsac really cares for you and wants to marry you, he will, being a Frenchman, naturally approach your father first."

"Yes, yes I know," interrupted the girl breathlessly. "And that's why you must never breathe a word to Dad about that Cornish affair. He has such old-fashioned, rigid sort of notions, that I know he'd insist on Raoul's being told about it, and then——" She threw out her hands with a hopeless gesture.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean it would be the end of all things. Do you think any Frenchman would look twice at a girl who had spent a week with another man, no matter how innocently? In the first place he'd never believe it was innocently. In the second—well, that'd be about all! Nappy!" She let her hands fall into her lap. Then she looked up at Pamela, her expressive mouth in a straight line. "If I had done anything really wrong, I might feel impelled to tell him myself. As it was only folly——"

"Sometimes people pay more dearly for folly than for the actual sin," Pamela reminded her.

"I'm not going to pay this time."

"One has always to pay for stolen fruit sooner or later."

"I'm not going to pay this time," said Dido again. "I don't care who else does."

"It seems to me that we are all paying, in a sense," said Pamela, heavily.

"You're not, anyhow."

"I don't know. I think I am. I'm greatly worried about the whole affair."

"Don't worry, poor old Mammy Pam. It will all come right. Things always do, if one lets them alone and doesn't worry."

"Someone has to worry."

"Now you're being pessimistic, old thing."

"Dido, have you any feelings for others, any heart?" cried Pamela sharply.

Dido stood still. A wonderful look stole over her little peaked face, into her liquid dark eyes.

"No. I haven't got any heart," she answered slowly. "I've given it all away, every bit of it."

"What will you do if M. de Marsac doesn't want to marry you?" thrust Pamela. "I have been told that he is not a marrying man."

She was half sorry she had spoken when she saw the change in Dido's face, the swift quelling of her radiance; but she felt that she had to warn the girl, that she could not leave her in her fool's paradise uncautious.

The cloud lifted again instantly.

"Would he have risked his life for me yesterday, if he had not loved me?" Dido asked.

"Any man of your acquaintance would have done as much. Dido, has he said *anything* definite to you?" pursued Pamela, with all the Irishwoman's desire for the

"hard word" as the definite proposal is called among the peasantry.

Dido shrugged impatiently. "I know he cares as I do. You yourself said that he would go to dad first. He might have gone to-day if it hadn't been for that snake-bite. Oh, Pam, if he dies, I shall die too!"

"Nonsense!" said Pamela, with a lack of sympathy, due to a growing uneasiness. "He's not going to die just now, nor you either! Be sensible, Dido. The more I think of this thing, the less I like it. You have put yourself in a very awkward position, to say the least of it. You have created a situation which is capable of a very ugly interpretation, and one which is very difficult to explain."

"It must be a rotten censorious old world if two pals can't stay at a village inn together for a week without people think evil of them," grumbled Dido.

"It *is* a censorious world. On your own admission you and Tim were more than pals. You were lovers. It shows how very young you are to have contemplated doing such a thing at all. Oh, I'd like to shake Tim!" cried Pamela suddenly. "I have no patience with him for being so weak. He should have known better. He shouldn't have let you put yourself in such a position."

"He couldn't help it," said Dido, magnanimously. "You don't know how nagging I can be when I want a thing. I can be as persistent as a mosquito and just as annoying. You mustn't blame poor old Tubby. He has enough on his shoulders as it is."

"I wish I could make you see the seriousness of it," sighed Pamela.

"'Fraid you can't, Mammy Pam. There's nothing really serious about it, so long as Dad and Raoul de Marsac don't know."

"But there is, Dido."

"But there isn't, Pam. You've promised not to tell them, and that's all that matters." Suddenly Dido dropped her flippant air and, sliding along the couch, nestled close to her as Kitty might have done. "Solemn old thing," she whispered. "Do you know what it is to fear a man even when you adore him? To feel thrills of fire at his touch, to want to defy him and be his slave all in one breath?" She sat up and away from Pamela again. "But of course you don't. How could you? Dad is a dear, but he couldn't possibly make you feel like that!"

"You're as bad as Great-Aunt Lucilla!" cried Pamela, pricked by the indictment. "*You* think I am too old to know anything. *She* thought I was too young. I know what love is, in spite of your denials, and I have sufficient experience to fear that what you are suffering from, Dido, is a bad attack of mere infatuation."

"It is not!" cried Dido indignantly. "How dare you say so? I love Raoul de Marsac with my whole heart and soul."

"My poor child, what do you know about love? It's very essence is sacrifice, its keynote selflessness," said Pamela half-reluctantly.

"I do know. I do!" Dido cried vehemently. "I'd walk barefoot through the world for him, and think it only a joy. I'd die for him this minute."

The change in her, startled Pamela, for out of the child's face a woman's soul peered suddenly; out of the dark eyes gleamed a woman's heritage, suffering.

CHAPTER XXXIII

CROSS CURRENTS

LANGRISHE did not return to luncheon, so the little party was, to Mrs. Waring's way of thinking, stupidly feminine. She was quite ready to fall in with Pamela's suggestion of a quiet afternoon.

"It will do us all good," she admitted graciously. "You young people had rather a riotous few days, and I have arrears of Christmas letters to write before I go on to Luxor."

Dido pricked up faun-like ears from her lethargy.

"When are you going to Luxor?" she asked, voicing the question which Pamela longed, but did not dare, to put into words.

"I must be getting on soon," Mrs. Waring returned vaguely. "But it is so delightful here that I am loth to make a move."

She did not want to burn her boats absolutely until she saw that there was no real chance of pursuing her favourite amusement, playing with fire, with Damer Langrishe at the other side of the flame.

"I hope you will stay as long as you feel inclined," said Pamela, with as much warmth as she could achieve. "Oh, what a hypocrite I'm getting!" she thought to herself. "I'll be a real society woman before I've done."

Dido shot a swift glance from beneath her eyelashes at her mother's old friend.

"I wonder what game she's playing," she mused. "She's up to something. No doubt of that. Otherwise

she'd never stay more than a day at a place like El-Armut. She's got her knife in Pam, anyhow. I'll keep my eyes open."

Which process she started by almost closing them.

"My little Dido has been burning the candle at both ends," Mrs. Waring said archly. "And as for poor Pamela, she looks quite worn out. When you come to my age, dear children, you will know how to take better care of yourselves."

"It gives one a great pull, though, to be still in the twenties," said Dido dreamily.

"Saucy child! Why you haven't reached them yet!"

"Haven't I? Sometimes I feel as if I were forty!" exclaimed Dido, stifling a yawn.

"You have a long way to go before you will know what that really feels like," said Mrs. Waring.

Pamela, with a swift desire to please, blundered fatally.

"I am sure it feels very much the same as the twenties, doesn't it?" she said, with a propitiatory smile at her guest.

Dido grinned. Mrs. Waring raised her eyebrows, and returned the smile sub-acidly.

"My dear Pamela, I'm afraid it will be several years before I can give you the benefit of my personal experience on that point. I am not quite so ancient as you imagine."

Pamela, flushing, floundered still farther.

"Oh, I'm sorry," she cried apologetically. "I thought you and Damer were about the same age. Cousin Helena was a year older, I know."

Mrs. Waring breathed a sigh of pity for Langrishe's misfortune in being tied to so gauche a creature. Aloud she said, as she rose from the luncheon table:

"Poor Helena was many years my senior."

Her tone held a gentle rebuke and an irritating forgiveness.

Hassan held the dining-room door open for three very silent ladies. Dido drew Pamela into the drawing-room, as Mrs. Waring went gracefully upstairs.

"Another moment and I should have burst!" she cried delightedly. "Pam, you were priceless. I only wish that it had been cleverness that inspired you, not simplicity."

"Why?"

"Because then you would be better able to cope with our Louisa. As it is——"

"As it is, I put my foot in it most dreadfully," Pamela sighed. "Why didn't you kick me, Dido, or prevent me in some way?"

"Not having the gift of thought-reading, I couldn't know what you were going to say," Dido retorted. "As it was, I wouldn't have missed it for anything. Her face was a positive study."

"It was awfully stupid of me, but I really thought she was over forty."

Dido went into peals of laughter. "So she is, of course. That was what rankled so much!"

"I don't see why it need. After all, it's not a crime to be forty."

"No, but it's one to look it," chuckled Dido. "Oh, Mammy Pam, you really *are* priceless. I'm so glad my dear, Father Noah married you."

"Don't Dido. I don't like you to call him that."

"Some of his ideas do come out of the Ark, though. Yours do too, so you're well matched."

Suddenly, to Pamela's intense surprise, Dido flung her

arms around her and kissed her. Then, finger on lip, she whispered dramatically, "Don't tell anyone!" and tip-toed from the room.

Pamela took a tangled skein of thoughts to her couch, and tried to unravel its varied threads. Dido, the principal one, presented several knots.

How young the girl was, in spite of her veneer of sophistication! She had been brought up in such a totally different school from herself, that Pamela found it very difficult to grasp her point of view, no matter how honestly she tried. They seemed to see everything from a different angle. She was like the leprechaun of Pamela's fairy-tale days, who had the power of changing into something else after you had grasped him, if you took your eyes off him for an instant. Again and again she imagined that she had grasped the real Dido, only to find some strange faun or elf within her hands. Her latest failure rankled most. She had thought to touch the girl's hidden humanity in her love for her father, and behold, her feeling was only fear lest he should force her to tell the compromising truth to the man she loved.

Her passion for de Marsac rang true. By the touchstone of Pamela's own love she knew it genuine as far as it went. But how far did it go? That was the problem. Was it merely the call of a physical passion, a fire that would quickly consume itself in the intensity of its own desire, or did a spark of the eternal lie within its soaring flame? Was de Marsac in earnest or was it just a passing fancy on his part? Was Dido the woman to hold him once desire was satisfied? She was young, she was vital, but she was crude with a crudity which might not appeal to that polished man of the world, that *blasé* amateur of women. Her sophistication was but a mask, easily adjusted, easily slipped aside. She was like no one else

whom Pamela had ever encountered, though she recognized common fundamentals beneath the girl's complexities.

With a sigh she thought of her own early life. If it had been Kitty, now, she would have known how to manage her, or even Babs. But then neither Kitty nor Babs would ever have committed such folly as Dido's. They had been too well brought up. That it had been only folly she never doubted. As she had truly said to Dido, she could not have believed her father's daughter capable of anything worse.

But it was an ugly story, and a difficult one to explain, if it should ever leak out.

Damer must not hear it: that was one thing certain. It would hurt him far too much. Not even Dido herself realized more fully than she did in what high esteem he held his own women-folk. They were beings apart; sacrosanct, as far as his ideals were concerned. Other women might be light, untruthful, disloyal, hypocritical: that was their concern. But from those of his own house he exacted, as from himself, the highest standard of honour.

Pamela knew him well enough now to realize that he would be wounded and humiliated to the core should either of them transgress his rigid code of ethics. Sometimes, being very human and full of flaws, she heaved a little sigh and wished that he were not quite so inflexible: but in her heart of hearts she loved and respected him all the more for it: and would not really have had him lower his standard by the eighth of an inch.

Why could not Dido have continued to care for Tim Doran? It would have simplified everything. Damer liked him, and though he might have insisted on a long engagement, he would probably have raised no other

objection. The family honour would have been safe in Tim's hands. But oh, how stupid the boy had been. Pamela felt exasperation against him rise within her. How did men look at such matters? She did not know. She was only aware that some inner delicacy in herself revolted from the careless way in which Dido had imperilled her reputation, that tender fragility, so easily damaged.

She tossed to and fro, finding but little rest.

Dido lay by her open window, watching the Nile boats drift by in the warm afternoon sunlight, their masts slanting like blown reeds against the shimmering distance. Some of them bore cargoes of great water-jars from Kenah, ends outermost, which looked like gigantic eggs of palest green, grey and cream. Now and again a song came from a passing boat, its harshness softened by distance, or the thin poignance of a reed-pipe pierced the drowsy stillness keenly as the cry of a kite. The Eastern music, so unfamiliar to Western ears, with its strange intervals and dissonances, brought back to her mind the sudden song in the secret-looking house. Her former vision returned to torment the girl. Her thoughts spun chaotically.

Was it only yesterday that it had all happened? Only yesterday that she realized and admitted to herself that she loved de Marsac for good or ill? Only yesterday that she had bowed her head to acknowledge him her master? He did not know that, of course, unless he had seen it in her eyes in that breathless moment before he had rushed to pull the snake from her path. . . . Pam was wrong. None of them would have done what he did. The others might have kicked the reptile aside or hit it with a stick, but he, with his bare hands, had snatched death from her foot. . . . Surely, surely, he loved her.

His looks, his touch told her so. There could not be such fire from mere contact with his hand did it not run in his own veins as well. . . . "Not a marrying man!" What a stupid, revolting phrase! How provincial of Pam even to utter it. Of course no man was a marrying man until the right woman came. But was she the right woman? Some little insistent doubt pricked her. In her mind's eye she could see de Marsac well content with the ministrations of his white-veiled houri. Could she be content with the attention of any man but him? Honesty compelled her to a grudging: "Well, perhaps—*pour passer le temps*—but not really!"

Maybe it would be "not really" with him too. In a day or two she would know.

A day or two? An eternity or two!

With all the impatience of youth, she tossed and turned, and thought the hours would never end.

Langrishe came home to tea to find only one member of his household awaiting his arrival in the drawing-room, and that his guest.

Heloise Waring, beautifully draped, coiffed and perfumed as usual, looked up from her favourite corner of the couch as he entered.

"Where's Pam?" he asked when he had greeted her.

It was invariably his question if she were absent on his return. On this occasion it acted on Heloise Waring with the same effect as the red cloth of the matador upon his already goaded victim.

"Dear Pamela has not appeared yet," she said sweetly.

"She seemed a little out of sorts this afternoon, and I urged her to have a good rest."

"Why was she out of sorts? Anything wrong?" queried Langrishe bluntly.

Heloise raised her expressive eyebrows and pursed her lips as if she were reluctant to speak.

"We—ll, no, nothing wrong exactly. At least, I hope not."

"What do you mean, Heloise?" Langrishe had had a tiring day and was in no humour for circumlocution.

"Nothing, dear Damer, nothing at all. I think we are all a trifle flat after our Christmas gaieties. Dido looks tired out, and of course Pamela must feel things a little slack without Mr. Doran."

"Naturally she'll miss him," returned Langrishe shortly. "She'll have to get used to that, though, for he's not coming down here again for a bit."

"No? How wise! Was it you or she——" She broke off suddenly as Pamela came into the room. "Ah, here is Pamela, Damer. Pamela, your husband has just been telling me that Mr. Doran is giving up El-Armut for the present."

Pamela rang for tea, giving Damer a smile on the way. "I know," she answered in quite an ordinary tone.

"He told me himself last night that he wouldn't be down again for some time. He's got to stick to his work now. It's better for him."

"Much better," said Mrs. Waring significantly, with a glance at Langrishe.

A little silence fell, during which Pamela busied herself with the tea-tray. Then Langrishe said suddenly:

"Doran's a decent chap. If he sticks to his job he'll be a fine man one of these days."

Heloise Waring's look of amused pity went unnoticed as he handed her a cup of tea. If he could but have read her thoughts, his old friendship for her would have died a sudden and violent death on the instant.

"Poor Damer! That little fool has completely turned

his head. I never thought that he was of the type of *mari complaisant!*"

Dido's entry broke the scarcely recognized tension.

"Hallo, Dad! It seems years since I saw you! Do you think you've earned me a new hat to-day?" She drew a stool near him.

"Two if you like. The question is do you deserve them?"

Pamela, looking at father and daughter, noted the softening of Langrishe's rugged face, the tenderness that broke up its rather grim lines, as he smiled at Dido. She sighed faintly. He would be vulnerable there.

"Of course I deserve it! I've been angelic all day, haven't I, Pam?"

Pamela, thinking of the morning's outburst, smiled non-committally. Dido rattled on without waiting for an answer. At last she paused to draw breath.

"Now you're looking better," she said to her father. "Aren't I a nice little fresh breeze to have blown your horrid thundercloud away?"

"You are," smiled Langrishe. "I had rather a worrying day. I had to sack a man—a chap I had trusted!"

"Why, Damer? What had he done?"

"He did what I could never forgive in anyone, Pam—lied to me!"

"Just lied to you?" queried Dido, in rather an odd tone.

"Deceived me wilfully. Had been doing so for weeks apparently. Looked me straight in the face, with honest, blue eyes, and lied to me deliberately."

"Honest, blue eyes? Then he must have been an Englishman," said Mrs. Waring.

"Naturally. One doesn't expect our code from the natives. Treachery is the meanest of all sins, the unforgivable one to me."

"Dad! How hard you looked when you said that! take off that grim expression at once."

"I can't," returned Langrishe curtly, though with a fleeting smile at the spoilt child so near his knee. "I can't all at once get over wilful deception in a fellow I trusted."

"No," said Pamela unexpectedly. "It would be very hard to bear." Her thoughts were with Dido, the careless little snatcher of forbidden fruit rather than with the real culprit.

Langrishe looked across at her with a clearing brow. "Ah, I'm glad you're with me there, Pam."

"Yes, I am. I, too, would find it very hard to forgive anyone who told me a deliberate lie."

"Even if it were someone you loved?" put in Dido playing a tattoo with nervous fingers on her father's knees.

"Especially if it were someone I loved," said Pamela slowly.

Again Langrishe's eyes met hers with an answering gleam. Then he rose.

"I have another hour's work to get through before dinner," he said. "I brought a lot of papers back with me."

"Oh, dear!" sighed Pamela. "Surely you might leave business behind you at the Barrage."

"I never ask any man to do more than I do myself. I expect him not to do much less, though," Langrishe answered, turning to go.

Dido got up from her stool and slipped her hand through her father's arm. Pamela, who had risen when Langrishe did, hoping for a word alone with him, sank back into her chair, disappointed.

"Ah, it is easy to see who comes first with dear

Damer," said Mrs. Waring pleasantly as the two left the room together.

Pamela bit her lip to keep herself from bursting into childish, unreasonable tears.

In the hall outside, Dido brought Langrishe to a stand-still near the table where the letters were put.

"Dad," she said tentatively, "if you are sending this evening to inquire for M. de Marsac, I've written him a little note of thanks, which I should like to send, too. I was too—well, too flurried to remember it yesterday."

"Right," said Langrishe. "I'm glad you thought of it, little daughter. I wrote to him myself last night."

"Oh, did you, Dad? How nice of you!" Dido's face lit up suddenly. Here surely would arise some new *rapproche* between the two men whom she loved in her own way!

"Nice? It was only common decency. Don't you know how precious you are to me, child?" said Langrishe, in a tone of deep feeling. "How can I feel anything but the sincerest gratitude towards the man who saved you from horrible suffering, if not worse?" His voice grew gruff, as it did when he was moved.

Dido looked into his face, the rare tears trembling on her long lashes.

"I'm glad you feel like that, Dad," she said simply.

"How else could I feel?" repeated Langrishe, naturally, attributing her emotion to her love for him. He took her little chin in his hand and kissed the upturned face. "I'm glad you told me about this letter, too. It shows what absolute straightness there is between us. Not that you would ever try to deceive me, Dido. I know that perfectly well, child. We trust each other too much for that."

He smiled, cupped the little, flushed face in his two big

hands, and kissed the top of the shining aureole before he turned into the room which he used as an office.

Dido stood for a moment where he had left her, her hands clasped above a wildly beating heart.

She had not known that anyone beside de Marsac could have such power to hurt her. Her father's love and faith pierced and stung her as no reproaches could have done.

For a moment she had a swift impulse to follow him, and tell him how badly she had behaved, how wilfully she had deceived him. Then memory flashed a picture of his stern, implacable face before her mental vision. He had never looked at her like that. He must never look at her like that. She could not bear it. She covered her face with her hands. Then she caught up her letter to de Marsac and kissed it passionately where his fingers must touch it in opening.

No, if to tell the truth meant to risk losing Raoul, then she must go on deceiving her father to the bitter end.

CHAPTER XXXIV

“HE WHO LOVES AND RIDES AWAY”

THERE was little enough in Dido’s letter to de Marsac—a mere line or two, signed, a trifle ceremoniously, in full.

“I cannot bear to think you are suffering for my sake. I have no words with which to thank you. The few that I will say to you when we meet will come straight from the heart of yours

“DIDO BEATON LANGRISHE.”

She had hesitated long over the signature; then decided that the short possessive pronoun might be made to mean everything—or nothing. She left it to him to read into it which he would.

The answer came just as she was going to bed that night. Hassan crossed the hall with it when she went out to light her candle.

She took the note from him with fingers that trembled suddenly, wished him a quick “good-night,” and ran up the stairs to her own room.

Once safely in seclusion, she tore open a thin mauve envelope, faintly redolent of the bazaars, to find within a folded sheet bearing a correspondingly brief answer to her message.

“It is a pleasure to me to have saved you unnecessary suffering. Even my seclusion has its own sweetness, for in my enforced solitude I can think for hours of—what I will.

“Yours in all affection,

“RAOUL JEAN MARIE DE MARSAC.”

Dido read the note over and over again with leaping pulses. It was cleverer than her own had been in its implications of all or nothing.

"In my enforced solitude I can think of—what I will."

That might mean anything or everything, just as she chose to read it. As for the ending, it was but a transcription of a very usual French one. It might possibly be intended to be taken literally, or yet it might only bear its surface meaning.

Dido's interpretations swung pendulum-wise, from one extreme to the other. Once she stopped to think how different this brief correspondence was from the little hastily scribbled notes which she and Tubby used to slip into each other's hand at Binky's rags.

"Yours till hell freezes," one of his had ended. Her lips curled at the remembrance. It was so typical of the wild absurdity of the whole affair, so deliberately put behind her now.

She lay awake half the night, now scaling pinnacles of ecstasy, now falling into abysses of despair; her sleeping thoughts ended with the colour of her waking ones and haunted by broken fragments of dream, vague, inestimable losses or madly rapturous joys.

Before the night was ended Damer Langrishe awoke suddenly to a thought keen as a nagging toothache. Pamela had not been herself that evening. Was it possible that she could be fretting about young Doran? He knew how the pain of another would touch her soft heart. He knew, too, the peculiar tenderness she felt for her old playfellow. It could be nothing more, surely? Yet Heloise had seemed to hint—— Women were more observant in these matters than men. She had been quite right about Doran. Had she any real reason to believe that Pam—— But no! Such a thought was absolutely

impossible. Pam cared for him, her husband. She was no hypocrite. She could not counterfeit the metal of her giving. It rang true, every gold coin. He would stake his soul on that.

Yet there had been certain reservations. He had known that from the first. Suddenly he recollected the little scene in the train on the way up from Port Said to Cairo, when she had begged for time before she gave him all she had to give. Time—for what? For forgetting another man? No, he could not believe that. Yet Heloise had talked of their parting as if it had held some special significance. What could this parting have been like, that it remained in her memory so definitely that she felt impelled to mention it to him?

That Heloise Waring had a sincere regard for him and his Langrishe honestly believed. That she could be venting any petty personal spite against Pamela by her insinuations never once entered his head.

The whole affair jarred inexpressibly upon him. He wished fervently that Doran had fallen in love with anyone else. Were there no girls in the world for him to choose from, that he must needs set his affections on another man's wife? Ah, but she was not married when he had set his affections on her. That was the rub. She was free, and he was free as his lack of means would permit.

Thanks to Heloise Waring's hints, Langrishe pieced out the whole half-sordid, half-pitiful little story. Half-sordid, because if Pam had really cared they could very well have waited a few years until Doran made good. Half-pitiful, because now they were all three involved in a tangle which there was no unravelling.

But did Pam really care for Doran? That was the thought that pierced him. Once the poisoned barb was

planted innumerable incidents, scarcely noted at the time, sprang back from the past, each pushing it in a little deeper. Looks, words, touches, silent signs of mutual understanding, rose up to buttress suspicion, to build it like a wall between him and his trust of her.

Not that he actually distrusted Pamela. The thing was too formless for that, as yet, but the very first breath of suspicion tarnished the clear shield of his faith in her, even if it faded away immediately again.

How emphatic she had been this evening in her condemnation of those who deceived the people who trusted them! He had welcomed her words then as the echo of his own code of honour. They came back to him now as the reluctant prickings of an uneasy conscience.

He turned and tossed restlessly. Good God, where were his thoughts tending? Into what morass of doubt were his uneasy feet leading him? He wished with all his heart that Heloise Waring had minded her own business.

For the first time in his life a doubt of her perfect tact crossed his mind. She had not meant to make mischief, of course, but she might just as easily have let well alone. To sow suspicion between husband and wife, however innocently, is an ill deed, and may bear an evil harvest.

So his thoughts spun to an early waking and a return of that grim expression which Dido had so deplored.

He was downstairs at work in his office before Pamela appeared. When they met at breakfast the inflexible line of his jaw frightened her a little; it looked so stern and hard. It seemed to set her apart from him at the very moment when she most longed to draw closer.

She would have given a good deal to be able to discuss Dido's problem with him. She felt she stood too near it herself to be able to judge its various aspects accurately. She wanted to hear his man's point of view, to lean on his

judgment, to find out what he really thought of the whole affair.

But, of course, it was quite impossible. She could not consult him about the thing at all unless she were at liberty to tell him all, and as to that her lips were sealed.

She stole a tentative glance at him during breakfast, wondering what had brought that hard look to his dear face.

It was partly what she called his "disparity look" to herself. It came sometimes when he was thinking of the gap in their ages. But surely that could not be worrying him now? She thought that she had exorcized that particular little demon long ago.

She followed him out in the hall for a last word. He went over to the corner where his hat and covert coat hung and took them down in silence.

"Let me help you," she said, but the coat was already on before she could give assistance.

She turned away her head a little chilled, a little disappointed. Why was he so aloof? Why did he keep her at such a distance? She made another effort. Going up to him she put her hands on his shoulders.

"Is there anything worrying you, Damer?" she asked gently.

In the upturned face, a little paler than usual, a little darker beneath the blue eyes, he read wifely duty, wifely solicitude—no more. What else could he expect from a girl fourteen years his junior?

"I didn't sleep very well last night," he returned shortly.

"Why? That's an unusual thing for you."

"Most unusual."

"Were you worrying about that person that deceived you?"

Langrishe hesitated. He had been worrying over a

person whom he thought might have deceived him. By the light of day, so often a swift disperser of the shadowy doubts of night, he saw nothing but a crystal clarity in Pamela's blue eyes. He had been a fool, and worse than a fool, to harbour such thoughts of her even for an instant. No, whatever happened, Pam would tell him the truth. He knew that!

Suddenly a mocking memory came to him of eyes, very much the colour of Pam's—a coincidence which, in fact, had drawn him instinctively to their owner—eyes which had looked straight into his while the lips beneath them mocked him with lies.

"It's always worrying to be deceived," he returned evading direct answer.

Pamela drew away a little, but his hands slipped to her wrists and held her there facing him.

"What about yourself, Pam?" he countered. "You don't look very bright this morning. Didn't you sleep well, either?"

"Oh, quite," she answered. "Not as well as usual, though."

"Not worrying about Doran's troubles—eh?"

"Not really."

"Or about the person with whom he is in love?"

Langrishe's eyes were searching.

Pamela reddened slightly under his scrutiny as she admitted :

"Well, perhaps a little."

"Try to forget it, Pam."

"I wish I could," she answered, stifling a sigh.

"Is it so hard, Pam?"

"I'm afraid it is, rather."

He dropped her hands.

"I'm sorry."

"So am I," she cried, wishing that she could tell him all. She went closer to him and leaned her head against a rather unresponsive arm. "Oh, Damer, how nice and big you are! One feels so safe with you."

"I hope you'll always feel that, my dear," he said gravely.

He stooped to kiss her forehead, put her gently away from him, and went.

Pamela stood there, bewildered and a trifle resentful.

"Why is he so cold?" she wondered. "What has happened to make him so cold, so aloof? Have I done anything? But no—what could I possibly have done? I can't think of a single thing. I've been positively hypocritical to Mrs. Waring just to please him. I've tried to be as much of a mother to his child as she'll let me. How have I failed him?"

It was the burden of her thoughts for the rest of the morning: "How have I failed him? How have I failed him?" It rang in her brain like the melancholy burden of a song—a tormenting question to which she could find no adequate answer.

Dido, too, was more elusive than usual. She spent the morning in a deck-chair on the loggia outside her bedroom, reading, smoking, and dropping into fitful dozes. She did not appear until luncheon-time, when she shook off her lethargy, brushed her red-gold halo until it shone, and went downstairs, eager for the breath of life which Langrishe's coming always brought into that feminine atmosphere.

To-day, beside the expected waft, he brought a bolt from the blue.

"Guess whom I met this morning," he said; then without waiting for conjectures: "De Marsac."

"M. de Marsac!" from Pamela and Heloise, in varying tones.

"He's well again, then?"—in a rather choked voice from Dido.

"He looked a bit pale," answered Langrishe. "He was on his way to catch the Cairo train. He had had bad news from France. His father is dying, and he was cabled for. He asked me to make his adieux to you all, and say that he hoped to see you again on his return to El-Armut."

There was an instant's silence.

"He is coming back again, then?" murmured Dido, in a tone that betrayed to Pamela the anguish of her doubt by the measure of its relief. "Did he say when?"

"No. He was in a hurry to catch his train. He hadn't much time. He seemed naturally upset, poor chap!"

Dido's eyes flashed a look at Pamela, which said as plainly as if she had spoken:

"This is the second time in my life when somebody's dying father has played me a nasty trick!"

CHAPTER XXXV

HELOISE SOWS ANOTHER SEED

"PAM, are you keen on a siesta?" asked Dido later, when Mrs. Waring had retired and Langrishe had gone back to his work.

"Not particularly. Why?"

"Because if I sit alone in my room and brood any longer I'll go mad." She looked about her restlessly.

"Oh, you mustn't do that," said Pamela, in her most comfortable common-sense tone. "What's the alternative?"

Dido's face seemed smaller and her eyes larger than ever. Pamela had a quick thought:

"The elf has found a human soul, and it hurts. . . . Poor kiddy!"

"Will you come and play singles with me on the Durrants' court? Mrs. Durrant said we might use it whenever we liked."

"Willingly," Pamela returned. "But we mustn't play tennis immediately after lunch. Come up to my room and lie down on Damer's bed for ten minutes or so." She slipped her hand through the girl's arm and moved towards the stairs, taking courage when she found that she was not repulsed.

"Very well. Anything's better than being alone, though I don't want to talk," Dido said significantly.

"All right, you needn't."

Dido looked curiously round the bedroom when she entered. Reft as it was of its couch and long mirror for

Mrs. Waring's benefit it had rather a bare aspect, holding as it did, little furniture beside the twin beds with their snowy mosquito-curtains and Pamela's wardrobe and dressing-table.

The walls were tinted a cool grey-green, the windows curtained austere in white: there was a freshness, a simplicity about it all that pleased Dido's fastidious taste.

"This room is like you, somehow, Pam," she said, kicking off her shoes, and tucking away the curtains of her father's bed before she lay on it.

"You like it?" answered Pamela, pleased.

"I like it for you. I shouldn't for myself." She lay on her side, one small hand under her cheek, and stared at Pamela with great questioning eyes. "It's strange to think of the secret lives we all lead—you, Dad, Heloise, myself—everyone; the secret, inner life that no one knows anything about except yourself, and sometimes one other. Even that other knows only a little bit of it, just the part you share with him, while all you know of his is the part he shares with you. . . . Don't you feel that, Pam? Don't you sometimes want to read Dad's thoughts and know what he's really thinking?"

"Indeed I do," sighed Pamela, wishing that such powers of perception were hers at that very moment. She would have given much to pierce the cloud that had arisen between them, impalpable, impenetrable: too vague to be tangible, yet real enough to blot out true understanding.

"Dad is a dear, until you come up against that granite streak in him," continued Dido musingly. "Have you come up against it yet, Pam?"

"Oh, no," answered Pamela, impelled by some queer sense of loyalty to deny her own misgivings.

"Nor I. I don't want to, either," cried Dido, turning

over on her back, and throwing out her arms with a great sigh. . . . She detached her mind from her own concerns for a fleeting moment to wonder what this cool, bare room could tell of Pamela and her father, when they were shut away from the rest of the world and left here alone, just man and woman together. . . . Then her thoughts switched back to herself again. "Here am I, with my secret life gnawing at my very vitals like some hungry beast, and I simply can't ask Pam for the sympathy which I know she's longing to give. Probably she's aching to say something kind to me now, but she's afraid to venture. I've made her afraid; but perhaps it's just as well. I won't be talked at! I won't be questioned. . . . Not that she'd really understand!" The old egoistic vaunt of Youth voiced itself. "No one could really understand how I feel, how I suffer!"

At last Dido's need of reassurance became too poignant to be held in check any longer.

"Pam, do you really think he'll come back?" she asked in a small voice.

Pamela held her breath for an instant, surprised at this unexpected demand for sympathy. Then she answered carefully: "Didn't your father say that he *said* he was coming back?"

"Oh, but it's easy for people to say things," murmured Dido impatiently. "If he doesn't come back——" she broke off with a sigh, and bit her lip.

"If he doesn't come back, perhaps he'll write," suggested Pamela against her better judgment.

"Oh, no, he won't." Dido gave a queer little smile. "He's not the sort of a man to be carried away at a distance. It needs personal contact to move Raoul de Marsac."

Pamela started. It was such a bitter little piece of

knowledge from such young lips. Then she said tentatively: "If physical contact is all that moves him it merely means a fire that would quickly burn itself out. Would you ever be really happy with a man of that type, Dido?"

Dido made a fierce, inarticulate exclamation.

"I'd rather be unhappy with him than happy with anyone else," she cried. "So that's that!" She sat up and slipped off the bed. "Come on, Pam. I must have some exercise."

"Very well." Pamela got up, too. She wished with all her heart that she could have given the girl some comfort, but the whole affair filled her with genuine uneasiness. She saw light nowhere. Even if de Marsac came back and proposed to Dido, a marriage with him scarcely seemed to presage happiness for the girl. Even Dido herself seemed to have some premonition of this, in her ignorance, as it seemed to Pamela, she was willing to face it, not knowing in the least all that an unhappy marriage might imply. Pamela, thinking of her own good fortune, gave a little shuddering sigh at the mere thought of what might have been.

Her hospitable instincts stopped her on the threshold just as they were going out.

"What about Mrs. Waring? I quite forgot her."

"Oh, hang Louisa!" cried Dido impatiently. "We'll be back long before she comes downstairs."

"I must leave a message with Hassan. It would seem so discourteous if she came down and found us gone without a word."

"Very well, but don't delay," Dido admonished her.

The girl was longing for violent exercise, longing to be so tired that she could neither feel nor think. Every fibre, every pulse cried aloud for Raoul de Marsac. She

felt a physical ache at the thought of his having left her without a word: an ache which must be numbed at any cost.

So insistent was this need that she kept Pamela playing longer than either of them realized, and thus it was that Langrishe on his return from the Barrage found once again the drawing-room occupied only by Heloise Waring.

His first impulse, and one of which he felt half ashamed, was to turn and flee. The power of association aroused a sense of uneasiness in him, which acted upon his instinct before his reason became aware of it and rejected it. To scotch so inhospitable a sensation he assumed a greater warmth than he felt.

"Hallo, Heloise, my girls seem to be neglecting their duty. They shouldn't have left you alone like this," he said genially.

"I should be sorry, indeed, to think that either of your girls, as you call them, should look upon entertaining me as a duty," returned Mrs. Waring, with a sweet smile. "No, indeed, Damer, I am quite capable of entertaining myself for a while. 'My mind to me a kingdom is,' you know."

"Good," he said, sinking into a deep chair near her, and putting his hand across his forehead.

"You're tired," she said with quick sympathy.

"Just a bit, perhaps."

"Pamela oughtn't to go off and keep you waiting for your tea like this. Shall I ring?"

"No, we'll wait. They'll be back in a minute."

"Young people will be young people, I suppose," sighed Mrs. Waring, tolerantly. "These violent games never appealed to me, though. I always preferred quieter pleasures."

"There's nothing to beat a good game of tennis," re-

turned Langrishe, roused to inexplicable contradiction.

"Ah, it's an excellent game, no doubt," said Mrs. Waring. She laid down her work and bent a little closer to him. "Tell me, dear old friend, while we have a moment to ourselves, was Pamela able to throw any light on that Cornish episode?"

"No," answered Langrishe shortly. "She wasn't there last summer at all."

"But she told me distinctly that she was."

"She said that she meant the summer before."

Mrs. Waring's lips curled incredulously. "I am afraid our dear Pamela was quibbling, not to put too fine a point on it."

"Pam's incapable of telling a lie," said Langrishe curtly.

"But of course, Damer. I never even suggested such a thing," returned Mrs. Waring with a hurt look. "For some reason best known to herself, the dear girl evidently wishes to confuse the date of her visit to Cornwall."

"I don't see why she should."

"Nor I," answered Heloise sweetly. "It seems meaningless, doesn't it?"

"Absolutely."

The entry of a breathless apologetic Pamela and a coolly nonchalant Dido, put a stop to any further privacy of conversation. Mrs. Waring, glancing from one face to the other, wondered if her shot had told. It was getting rather boring here. Damer had grown stupid. There was no other amusement at hand. The young men buzzed round Dido like bees round a honeypot. Surely there must be metal more attractive up at Luxor, whither the smart crowd had probably fled by this time to escape the dampness of a Cairo Christmas. The Tal-

bots should be there by now, and Mrs. Talbot had rather a knack of collecting amusing people. It was really time to make a move. She could not be bothered with the Langrishes' affairs any longer. If they chose to get them into a tangle they must unravel it themselves without her assistance. Dido, too, like her dead friend's child! She had all the modern self-confidence and self-assurance; no pretty, modest, clinging ways at all. And between her and Pamela they hadn't even a maid! No, she had had enough of roughing it on the river, as she would phrase it presently. She longed for some of the comforts of civilization again.

Her resolution once formed, she waited only for a pause in the conversation to make it known. At last it came. She seized it.

"Will you look up the trains to Luxor for me, like a dear?" she said suddenly to Langrishe.

He started. "But surely you're not thinking of leaving us yet. Why, you've only just come." He shot a quick glance at Pamela, who hastened to back him up.

"Yes, indeed. Is there any real need for you to go so soon?"

Dido's *sotto voce*—"Can't you go? Must you stay?"—fortunately escaped Mrs. Waring's hearing as she answered:

"It is very sweet of you, dear people, to want me, but I warned you that I was only a bird of passage on my way to Luxor. I promised to join the Talbots there for the New Year's Eve festivities. There is to be a delightful affair at the Winter Palace Hotel, I believe."

"I'm afraid we can't offer any counter attractions to that," said Langrishe, smiling. "I don't like to urge you to stop on in a dull little place like this, but you know how very welcome you are here, Heloise."

"Ah, yes, I know," murmured Mrs. Waring, with a sweeping glance which included the whole party.

Then a sudden thought struck her: a sudden doubt of her own personal powers of attraction. She had not been a conspicuous success at El-Armut. Not even one of the young men had fallen a victim to her pseudo-maternal fascinations. Mrs. Talbot, too, had scarcely the power of forming such a circle as she desired.

How would it be if she renewed the invitation which she had given to Dido in Cairo? How would it be if she took the girl on to Luxor with her? She was chic, bright, with the modern hardness, yet undoubtedly attractive. She would always have a crowd of men in her train, men who would come to Heloise Waring for balm and sympathy when suffering from the smart of her little claws. There are always privileges for the chaperon of a pretty girl, and once away from Pamela's influence she would take her rightful place in the dear child's affection. It was worth considering. But, no, on second thoughts, there was no time for consideration. It must be now or never. After all she need not keep her any longer than she wished. She could make her invitation a short one, and prolong it afterwards if she liked. After all, she owed the Langrishe family a good deal of hospitality, one way or another.

She turned to Damer with a smile.

"I have been wondering if you would let Dido come back to Luxor with me for these New Year's festivities," she said. "If you can spare her, I am sure she'd enjoy it, and, of course, I should delight in having her. What do you say, Dido?"

Pamela felt a prick. "Why couldn't he spare her? Aren't I here?"

Dido turned grateful eyes for once on her mother's old

friend. "How ripping!" she cried. "It is the thing of all others I'd like. Of course I may go. Mayn't I, Dad?"

Langrishe shook his head at her.

"In such a hurry to leave me already, when you've only just come out? Ungrateful monkey!"

Only Pamela discerned the hurt beneath the light tone, and that queer, nasty, feeling pricked at her heart again. Was it, could it possibly be jealousy, that meanest, pettiest of vices? She flushed, unnoticed.

"It isn't that, you know, Dad," Dido answered eagerly. "But it seems a chance in a hundred. A chance not to be missed. It's really topping of you, Heloise. I'd simply love to go."

"We may consider it settled then," said Mrs. Waring sweetly, smiling again at Langrishe. "I'll take great care of your treasure, dear old friend, and send her back to you quite soon again. You surely can exist for a week or so without her."

"Well, naturally, considering that I existed previously under the same circumstances for five years," returned Langrishe, a trifle dryly. Then, with a slight mental effort which he trusted was unobserved by anyone but himself, he turned to his wife: "It will be a second honeymoon for Pam and me."

Pamela smiled back rather mechanically, the while her heart protested: "He didn't mean that a bit."

CHAPTER XXXVI

GOOD ADVICE

AT the core of Pamela's mingled feelings was one drop of balm, the unexpected possibilities of what Damer had called their second honeymoon. Once she had him to herself again without the intervention of constant comers and goers, surely she could soon thaw the slight coolness which had arisen between them with the warmth of her love.

While other eyes watched them, inimically critical as Mrs. Waring's, amusedly observant as Dido's, that was impossible. Left alone, they would draw nearer together than ever. Of that she felt sure. Also she knew that this infinitesimal rift, whatever it was, must not be allowed to widen. That, with a man of Damer's calibre, would be fatal, she felt intuitively. He had no aptitude for leaping chasms. His code, in all its rigidity, had stiffened him too much for that, except perhaps the one of age, and that their mutual love had bridged, making passage easy.

She waited the day of departure hopefully. She felt that it was well that the girl's thoughts should be distracted as much as possible from the obsession of her passion for de Marsac.

Surely, among all the nice men she was bound to meet, up at Luxor—but the thought trailed off to nothingness in Pamela's mind, as she suddenly realized that in daughter as in father ran the same unmistakable granite streak. No other man could, as yet, erase the memory of

de Marsac from Dido's heart. She felt that she would wrong the girl by even thinking it possible.

Dido herself was in the wildest of spirits at the thought of the change.

To leave El-Armut, already so stored with memories that burnt or stung or thrilled, for any new place, presaged relief for the ache that at times seemed almost unbearable. She was too young to realize that wherever she went she must take her hurt with her so long as, to paraphrase the Elizabethan poet, "She was herself her own fever and pain." How could she flee from "Love's sickness" when she carried it with her? She was paying a little now for her stolen fruit, if she had but known it; though consciously she would never have admitted this.

She clung to Pamela for a moment in her own room just before she went.

"You'll send on any letters that come at once, Pam, won't you? And write instantly if you hear anything. Promise."

"I will, of course. And Dido——"

"Yes?" said Dido distrustfully.

"Don't set your heart too much on M. de Marsac, just in case——"

"I wonder if you've been absolutely deaf to all I've told you, or are you merely stupid?" interrupted Dido hotly.

Pamela bit her lips. "Merely stupid, I'm afraid. . . . It's only that I don't want you to be hurt."

"I'm hurt already," returned Dido, relenting a little. "Cheerio, Mammy Pam. You can have Tubby down to play with once I'm gone."

"Indeed, I don't want to see him," Pamela declared, "unless 'twas to give him a great scolding. Have a good time now, child, and forget all your worries."

Even as she spoke she felt that she was giving super-

fluous advice, that Dido would always have a good time, irrespective of consequence or circumstance, and that she would let nothing worry her that she could possibly help.

Mrs. Waring's valediction was of a slightly different nature.

When Pamela went to her room to see if she could help in packing, she found that it was finished already and that Mrs. Waring was in the act of putting on her veil.

She thanked Pamela profusely for her belated offer, while making her feel that she might have thought of it a little sooner.

"You see, I am such an old traveller, I like to be ready in plenty of time," she went on. "When you have had as much experience as I have you will realize what an infinity of trouble it saves. But Rome wasn't built in a day, neither does experience come with a single journey."

"No indeed," answered Pam politely, wondering why she was being treated to these platitudes, and feeling a deep inward thankfulness at the thought of her guest's imminent departure.

Perhaps the spirit of the "shadowy third" which Heloise Waring seemed always to evoke, would vanish with her. Pamela devoutly hoped so.

"Of course I am much older than you are, dear Pamela," Mrs. Waring went on, pinning back her flowing veil and standing a little away from the mirror to see the effect, "though not quite as ancient as you supposed"—("Ah, that forty evidently rankles still," Pamela thought)—"and you will not take it amiss if I give you a little advice." She paused.

"No," murmured Pamela, monosyllabic for once in her endeavour to be polite. Advice was the last thing she desired from Mrs. Waring.

"Dear Damer is the best of men, but all men are a little

difficult at times. You will be wise to be judicious in your management of him, Pamela——”

“I haven’t the least intention of managing Damer, thanks.”

“Young wives and middle-aged husbands!” sighed Mrs. Waring, readjusting her veil. “A difficult position, especially when there are young men about.”

“The young men here——”

“Ah, but not only here. Anywhere,” said Mrs. Waring, retreating into a skilful vagueness. “But that wasn’t what I really wanted to say. It was only a side issue as it were. Damer tells me that you are going to stay out here for the summer.”

“Yes. He thinks it will be all right for us, probably.”

“Hot weather in the East has a very relaxing effect. You will do well to take what exercise you can, and stick to your corsets.”

“Stick to my corsets?”

“Yes. There is nothing more demoralizing for a woman than to leave off her corsets. It seems to unbrace her mentally as well as physically. It is fatal, especially in the East.” Her tone held a rather disproportionate seriousness.

“But I never wear any,” said Pamela, smiling in spite of herself. “Only those sports things. I’m afraid I have no chance!”

Mrs. Waring sighed. The girl was hopelessly frivolous. She would not take the word of warning so tactfully conveyed in sartorial guise. She must have known that the corsets were only a symbol: a little allegorical sign-post, as it were. Poor Damer! What a marriage!

Langrishe himself saw them off by the early train. Pamela, by special request of Dido, did not go to the station.

"It's all right having dad. He can see about the luggage and all that," she declared. "But you'd just stand about racking your brains for things to say, and not finding them, and we'd be bored, and you'd be bored, and we'd all be indecently glad when the train went off, so what's the use?"

Pamela, acknowledging the truth, stayed at home, feeling a strange sense of flatness when they had gone which took the first sparkle from her original sense of relief.

The house seemed empty and full of shadows, in spite of the brilliant sunshine outside. A crisp wind blew, ruffling the river to a steely brightness; and sending drifts of white cloud scudding across a vivid sky.

At the end of the garden the *sakkiyeh* creaked and little Ali, lying along the shaft in his one scanty blue garment, sent forth an occasional burst of song as he urged the patient fawn bullock on its monotonous round.

For a moment Pamela felt fretfully as if she were rather like the bullock, daily setting in motion an endless chain of little duties which led to nothing beyond. Then, with her usual zest for metaphor as she plunged deeper into the heart of this one, she saw that the bullock's task, though monotonous, had a beautiful end in view, the irrigation of the rich Egyptian soil with the fertile Nile water which made, as Heloise Waring had so poetically put it, the desert blossom like a rose.

Was not she, likewise, making a garden for Damer where there had been, on his own telling, but a bare compound before? He was a man of few words, taking for granted in others what he wished them to take for granted in himself, and Pamela was beginning to learn what some of his eloquent silences meant. Being a woman, she always wanted to translate them into terms of speech, not

realizing that like other foreign tongues, they might lose considerably in the exchange.

There need be no barriers between them now that Heloise Waring and Dido had gone. No necessary restraints and constrictions of speech such as the presence of others imposes. The whistle of the departing train, shrilling across Ali's song, seemed to Pamela as the blowing of the trumpet that shattered the walls of Jericho.

Her spirits rose at the thought. She seemed to see the shadows which had stolen about the house, dim shadows of passions which she had sensed without actually perceiving, creeping out of their corners to fall vanquished by the broad sword of sunlight.

She changed into one of her prettiest frocks for luncheon, and re-arranged the flowers on the table.

She had ordered Damer's favourite dishes. It should be a little feast, their "second honeymoon" luncheon.

At the sound of his key in the door she ran out into the hall to meet him, but stopped, feeling an altogether disproportionate sense of disappointment when she saw that he was not alone. Mr. Marshall was with him.

The spring died out of her step as she crossed the hall towards the two men, and held out her hand to the guest.

"Will you tell them to hurry with lunch, Pam? Marshall and I have a tough bit of business to tackle afterwards," was Damer's greeting.

"I think it must be ready now. I'll ring," she said, rather flatly.

The walls of Jericho hadn't fallen after all. The little feast was no feast after all. It was just an ordinary luncheon, to be hurried over as quickly as possible so that Damer might continue, even more technically, the conversation which he carried on with Mr. Marshall throughout the disappointing meal. The others might just as well

have stayed; better, in fact, for then there would have been someone to talk to. Pamela's spirits sank.

As a finishing touch, Damer, leaning across the table to emphasize a point, knocked down and broke one of her slender-stemmed Venetian vases, thus ruining the festal decoration. She rose, leaving Hassan to clear away the débris. Langrishe's discussion with his colleague lasted on until tea-time, and was continued afterwards, to the accompaniment of cigars which made Pamela's head ache.

She went up to her own room and out on the loggia, drinking in the fresh air without realizing how cold the atmosphere was until she felt thoroughly chilled.

She was shivering when Damer came up to dress.

"Really, Pam, you ought to have more sense at your age," he cried, when he heard what she had done. "A hot bath and bed is the only place for you. Perhaps you'll stave off a bad chill that way."

Pamela, longing for the sympathy which Damer felt, but masked under a cross uneasiness lest she should be ill, moved slowly towards the bathroom.

"I'll turn on your bath," said Damer. "You slip out of your clothes, and it will be ready by then. Did I tell you that I'm keeping Marshall on to dinner? There are still some points we have to discuss."

"Ah, then I shan't miss anything," murmured Pamela flatly.

Langrishe smiled. "No, you poor kid. It's been dull for you all day, I'm afraid, and without the others, too."

She longed to tell him that she didn't want the others, that it was only him she wanted, but he was gone. Already she heard the trickle of the bath-water.

Even when he brought up a dainty tray later, with soup and fruit to tempt her, she found it hard to get nearer to him.

He kissed her hot forehead, and said he would make her take some quinine presently, but when he brought it up she was asleep and he did not awaken her. He stood looking at the flushed face framed in its dark silky hair for a moment before he turned away with a sigh.

CHAPTER XXXVII

SECOND BEST

PAMELA, being young and strong, quickly threw off the effects of her chill. Beyond a touch of headache and a slight sense of lassitude, she felt none the worse the next morning.

Damer made her stay in bed for breakfast and waited on her himself with a touch of solicitude added to his old tenderness.

"I can't afford to have you laid up, you know," he said before he left for the Barrage. "The place is a wilderness without you."

"You really want me then?" said Pamela, rather wistfully.

"Of course I want you," said Damer with a reassuring roughness.

She did not know that her question pricked him uneasily. Was she comparing his need of her with another's? Was she buttressing her sense of duty with his claims? "God knows I want her more than anyone else could," he thought. "But I don't want to frighten her into the arms of another man."

Therefore he used restraint where emotion would have served him better, and curbing where loosing might have advantaged.

So the days sped, outwardly happy, inwardly filled with a cloud of disappointments for each.

Damer made his wife his first consideration, rode with her, planned little excursions for her, arranged tennis for

her—but never alone. From something in Pamela's eyes—a look at once appealing and apprehensive—he shrank. At the back of his mind he had a haunting fear that once they touched intimacy again she might tell him of her love for Doran. That he could not stand at any cost. He was a man of strong passions, firmly curbed. He did not mind so much knowing of Doran's feeling for Pamela, but if Pamela revealed hers for Doran he felt that it would make him see red, make him want to kill the boy. Silence was at once his weapon, his shield and buckler. Therefore Pamela, sweet, entrancingly sweet and desirable as she was, must be kept more or less at arm's length, lest if she came too close, she might whisper in his ear that which would lead to their ultimate undoing.

Pamela, intuitive as she was, sensed his attitude without being able to understand it. It was as if some transparent barrier, tangible and clear as glass, had arisen between them. They could see each other through it, hear each other, come quite near each other, but they could not touch. She longed desperately for some weapon with which to shatter it, but found that, despite its hyaline quality, it was made of substance far stronger than the glass which it resembled.

They lived on the surface of life, as so many people do quite happily, and to all outward appearances their relations were almost ideal. But not to the two who knew how different they once had been, how different they still might be. Having tasted the best, the second best had but little savour.

The days spun into weeks, and still Dido showed no sign of return. She was having a ripping time, she wrote, and Luxor was a topping place. They could expect her when they saw her—no sooner.

Langrishe passed the letter on to Pamela.

"It's dull here without the child," he said, feeling that Dido would be an additional help towards a resistance that wore rather thin at times.

"I'm sorry you find it so."

"Well, you must admit that she livens things up a bit. Still, one can't expect her to leave Luxor for a dull little place like this."

"Why not? If you had always expected more of Dido you might have got more from her," returned Pamela rather tartly. "Instead of which, you've spoilt her so utterly that her one idea is to take, take, take, without giving anything in return."

"I don't agree with you, Pamela," said Langrishe, stiffening at once at disparagement of his "ewe lamb." "Dido gives herself, her gaiety, her brightness in return for whatever she may get out of life."

His altered tone flourished a danger signal for Pamela. Surely he could not think she was jealous of the girl? She must disabuse his mind as soon as possible.

"Dido has great possibilities," she said. "That's why I get so angry at seeing the wrong ones developed and the right ones stunted. I'm too ignorant myself, I'm afraid, to know how to manage her, or even help her."

"Shall I give you 'an advice,' Pam?" said Langrishe on a gentler note. "Don't try to manage her at all!"

"That's been my plan up to the present," Pamela admitted rather ruefully. "But I don't know how it has worked."

"It's worked very well. Dido has a great opinion of her Mammy Pam." His tone softened as it always did when he spoke of his child; as it used to when he spoke to her.

"Will it ever soften for me again?" Pamela wondered with a sick throb of misgiving.

Her thoughts turned to her own people in these trying days. She longed to see a familiar face, anyone from the past, that now seemed so remote, so tranquil in its happy monotony. Not that she would have changed back again had she been given the choice. Womanhood had opened her eyes to a wider vista than any she had looked upon at Carrigrennan. She would go forward on her appointed way, clear-sighted, facing with courage any suffering which it might involve—forward, for better, for worse.

By a natural transition her mind switched from her unavailable family to a very available link with the past who was close at hand.

Now that Dido was safely in Luxor the embargo on Tim Doran's visits might be removed. It could not possibly hurt him to run down and see her for an hour or two just between trains. She felt that the sight of his freckled face and humorously sympathetic eyes would be like water in a dry land.

Acting on impulse she wrote to him, telling him of Dido's departure for Luxor, and saying that she would be very glad to see him whenever he could conscientiously spare the time to run down to El-Armut.

Being no letter-writer, Doran characteristically telegraphed back his answer: "*Right-ho!—Tim.*" The wire arrived shortly after Langrishe had left one morning, and Pamela, reading it, with a smile, crumpled it up and threw it into the fireplace.

As usual, Langrishe brought men back both to lunch and dinner, and Pamela forgot to mention the matter to him. She went to bed before he did that night, leaving him in the drawing-room, and he was standing by the fireplace, smoking a last cigar, when the little ball of pinkish paper in the grate caught his eye. Stooping to

pick it up and toss it to where a fire of logs was already laid, he saw that it was a telegram.

"I didn't chuck a wire in there, did I?" he said to himself, absently smoothing out the flimsy sheet.

The two words—"Right-ho!—Tim"—sprang at him as if written in letters of fire.

What did they mean? Had Pamela been wiring to Doran, and was this the answer?

It was an obvious answer, a glad accession to some request. What request?

He crumpled the thing up again, and flung it from him as if it had stung him.

What was Pamela asking of Doran? Why had she wired or written to him? Why had she said nothing to him about it? If the thing had some simple, natural explanation, why had she not told him about it? Why had she kept it secret from him?

In the swift surge of jealousy which flooded him, Langrishe lost sight of the fact that he had scarcely had time for a word in private with Pamela throughout the day. Of late he had not encouraged her to stay on in the drawing-room with him after the guests had gone. He had hurried her off to bed. Sometimes she had been asleep when he went upstairs. Sometimes she had not. Often in the night he had heard her sigh as she turned from side to side restlessly, while he lay still in the endeavour to persuade her by his breathing that he was fast asleep.

What was to be the upshot of it all? They were three straightforward, decent people. Pamela was his. He wasn't going to give her up. Doran was too decent a chap for that. Still, he *had* been mixed up in that Cornish business. Men used such queer sophistries to muffle their consciences when they were in love.

Suddenly it occurred to him to wonder if he were using

them now—if he were facing this thing as it should be faced. His forgotten, half-smoked cigar fell from his fingers into the fireplace as he tried to envisage the stark facts of the case.

Doran was in love with Pamela.

She had been in love with Doran before she married him. She was—it had to be faced—in love with him still. She had fought against it for a time, and sent him away. Now, probably, she wanted him to come back again, and Doran had telegraphed assent.

That was the situation in a nutshell. He frowned as he stared into vacancy, taking no heed, for the moment, of his own hurt.

Pamela, the girl he had vowed to love and to cherish till death did them part, was his wife. He had taken the responsibility of life on his shoulders that sunny morning in the Bombay Cathedral. He must be strong for her now, as well as for himself. He could not run the risk of letting her and Doran meet too often.

"Youth calls to youth," Heloise had said. Young blood runs hot, and is easily fired. Sometimes a touch may undo the restraint of weeks, letting loose a passion that cannot be quelled. Absolute severance was the only remedy.

He sighed heavily. What misfortune was this that had come upon them? For, knowing Doran and Pamela as he did, he credited them both with his own simple desire to do the right, not merely the expedient, thing. His was the method of the clean cut. No temporizing, no compromise for him. In this instance the two men were tied to the place by their work. Pamela was the one who must go.

Yes, that was the solution of the whole matter. Instead of keeping Pamela out here for the summer, as he had in-

tended to do, he would send her and Dido home. He would talk things out with her first. He would be very gentle, very patient, very tolerant. He would get her to promise to break finally with Doran.

In August or September he would get leave and go home. They could talk the matter over again then, and see if they couldn't readjust their lives together on a workable basis.

It was all very calm, very reasonable, very judicial; but—chilling to the heart's core.

"Oh, damn!" groaned Langrishe, covering his eyes with his hands. "Am I never going to have anything but the second best all my life? Pam—Pam!"

Primitive man, with his elemental needs and desires, had him by the throat. Jealousy seethed at the thought of the man who had come before him in his woman's heart. Heloise Waring's innuendoes suddenly dropped their veils and stood before him as bare facts.

Why should Pamela have wished to confuse the date of her visit to Cornwall? Why—why?

Was it because— Oh, God, no! No, it couldn't be that! Pam wasn't—she couldn't—

Out of the tangle of thoughts the horrible suspicion leaped on him like a wild beast, clawing, tearing, rending. Try as he would, he could not rid himself of it. It tore his calm to tatters, made shreds of his judicial reasoning. Neither peace nor ease could be his until he had it by the throat in Pamela's presence. He would go to her at once.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

ANOTHER PAYS FOR THE STOLEN FRUIT

EVEN on the thought the clock on the chimney piece sent out two silvery chimes. Damer looked at it in amazement. Two o'clock! He couldn't disturb her now. He had forgotten, too, to tell her that he had to go down to Cairo by the first train in the morning to meet Sir John Crooke, who was due to arrive there that night. He would probably have to stay down for the night. He wouldn't see her in the morning, either.

Perhaps it was just as well. He didn't want to face her with this thing between them until they could have it out together.

Langrishe was hardly sane in his thoughts that night, but he was sanely hard when he boarded the train next morning, and went down to Cairo to meet Sir John Crooke.

* * * * *

Pamela felt a little frightened when, on awakening next morning, she saw that her husband's bed had not been slept in. She had heard him come up the night before, listening drowsily to his movements in his dressing-room before she dropped off to sleep again.

The empty white bed with its snowy mosquito curtains tucked carefully round nothing, gave her a queer, chill feeling, as if Damer had been suddenly reft from her. Such a thing had never happened before. She felt uneasy at its having happened now.

A tap at the door announced Hassan's arrival with the morning tea.

"Perhaps Damer wanted to get up early and slept in Tim's room," she thought. "I wish he hadn't though. I'd much rather that he had stayed here. He wouldn't have disturbed me at all. I don't want him to drift away any further."

Hassan pointed to a folded note on the tray, and said in his soft, guttural English:

"The Master say give the *sitt* that. He go by train early and sleep in Done Effendi's room not to disturb the *sitt*."

"Ah," breathed Pamela on a sigh of relief. "Thank you, Hassan." So that was it! He had had to go by train somewhere and had not liked to disturb her. She tore open the note with fingers that trembled a little. It was brief and businesslike.

"MY DEAR PAM,—I quite forgot to tell you last night that I have to go down to Cairo to-day to meet Sir John Crooke. I may have to remain the night. If so, get Mrs. Durrant to put you up. I shall be back by five o'clock to-morrow at any rate.

"Yours,
"DAMER."

How curt! How cold! How bald!

Quick tears welled in Pamela's eyes as she read the terse lines, unsoftened by even one word of conventional affection. What had happened to their love, the beautiful thing that had so rounded and enriched their lives? It was a real thing, a living thing. Surely nothing could have killed it so soon. It was too vital for that.

She dressed slowly, feeling that all the meaning of life had gone out of it with Damer's absence.

The long hours dragged by on leaden feet in spite of her varied efforts to hasten them. Luncheon-time approached with a menacing vision of another solitary meal.

She was just wondering if she would have the courage to order for herself a tray in the drawing-room when the door opened, and Hassan, his dark face beaming, announced:

"Don Effendi, ya sitt!"

Pamela dropped the crotchet pattern which she was trying to master, and sprang to meet Doran with outstretched hands. She quite forgot her anger and her promised scolding in her delight at seeing him again.

"Why, Timsy dear, what good wind blew you here?" she cried rapturously. He held her hands for an instant longer as he looked down into her welcoming face.

"It's Friday, the Mohammedan holiday, you know. We always dock work that day. Your letter didn't sound too chirpy, so I thought I'd run down and see what was up." His friendly eyes noted her pallor now that the flush of welcome had faded, noted, too, the sharpened contour of cheek and chin and the dark marks under her eyes. "What have you been doing to yourself, Pam? You don't look half the girl you did when I last saw you."

Pamela reddened a little under his scrutiny and drew away her hands.

"Oh, I'm all right," she answered lightly. "I've been fretting for Mrs. Waring, I suppose!"

Doran laughed. "I *don't* think! . . . My God, what a woman! How does Mr. Langrishe stick her?"

Pamela smiled. "Old associations, probably. Here's Hassan to tell us luncheon is ready. I'm so thankful to have you, Tim. I was dreading the prospect of another solitary meal."

"Why? Where's your husband?"

He's gone down to Cairo to meet Sir John Crooke. He may not be back till to-morrow."

"Ah, then, that puts the stopper on my staying here for the night."

I suppose it does," said Pamela ruefully. "Though really, I don't see——"

"Nor I—but there you are! Others might."

"Which reminds me," said Pamela, tucking her hand through his arm and leading him across the hall, "that I have a frightful scolding to give you."

"Fire away," returned Doran smiling happily at her. "I suggest delivering it after luncheon on the terrace with our coffee."

"Ah, but I'm not joking at all," she warned him.

After luncheon a batch of home letters arrived which postponed the scolding still further, for there were bits of news to be discussed, leading to further "Do you remembers," which spun the hours to an astonishingly quick close.

"It's hard to believe that Kitty is grown up," said Doran at last.

"Indeed it is," Pamela agreed. "She's as pretty as a picture, and as sweet as honey, and with it all she's got a nice hot little temper of her own."

"I wouldn't give a pin for a girl without one," said Doran warmly.

Pamela caught her breath at a wonderful thought, whirled off at once on the married woman's favourite game. . . . Suppose that she had Kitty out next winter. . . . Suppose that she and Tim . . . ? He looked different already. His eyes had lost that miserable look. . . . She wouldn't say a word, of course. She'd be discretion itself, but . . .

Her scolding was quite forgotten in the roseate dreams of her last hours of comparative happiness.

Langrishe did not return by the five o'clock train, so Pamela and Doran went to the Durrants to invite them to dinner.

"You'd much better stay and dine with us," Monica Durrant said.

"It would make a better break for you, Pamela, while Mr. Langrishe is away. You're always having people at your place. You never come here. Mr. Doran can have a shake-down for the night with us. Pleasant tongues might only wag if he stayed with you."

"Someone will have to come over and breakfast with me," declared Pamela, "I cannot face Hassan's melancholy brown eyes alone. They watch every mouthful I eat, and quite take away my appetite."

Thus it was that Doran only left El-Armut by the train that brought Langrishe back from Cairo. He saw, with a shock of surprise, the familiar lanky figure jumping into a first-class compartment just as the train was moving out of the station.

The passion which he had kept under during his business visit rose chokingly within him at the sight.

"The cur!" he thought. "The minute my back was turned. . . . That was what the wire meant. Damn him!"

If Heloise Waring could have seen him then she would have realized that her "dear old friend" was not of the stuff of which the *mari complaisant* is made.

He turned curtly to Hassan who had come to meet him.

"Done Effendi is just gone," the man told him in Arabic. "He runs for the train as usual. He is like the gazelle, leaping where others walk."

If Langrishe had not been so obsessed by the ugly

thought that had hold of him he could not have refrained from a smile at the comparison of the gawky Tim to anything so exquisite as a gazelle; but humour, pity and the tender things of life had no place in his mind just then.

The minute his back was turned the two whom he trusted had betrayed him. The black thought filled his mind to the exclusion of all else.

Hassan's guttural voice rambled amiably on, telling his master all the latest news.

"The *sitt* found the day very long until Done Effendi came. There was no dinner at the house. They dined with Durrant Effendi and the two gentlemen saw the *sitt* home. Done Effendi went back with Durrant Effendi for the night."

"Enough," said Langrishe shortly. He had no desire for information through the lips of a servant.

What did it matter if the outward conventions were observed, if the inward betrayal had been made? He strode through the town, cleaving the many-coloured crowd as a swimmer cleaves the sea, with eyes that saw nothing but Pamela in Doran's arms, ears that heard nothing but the words that betrayed him.

So obsessed was he by the one idea, so skilfully had Heloise Waring prepared her ground and sown her seed, that no glimmering of Pamela's innocence even occurred to him. So completely did one tiny piece of evidence to the contrary fit into another that the damning whole admitted of no other possible construction.

At last he reached the house and went up the steps.

Pamela, every sense on the alert for his coming, ran into the hall at the sound of his arrival.

"Welcome home, my darling," she cried in her softest,

most caressing tones, as she went towards him with arms outstretched.

She checked suddenly at sight of his grim face, the hard unyielding line of chin and jaw, the piercing accusation of the eyes beneath their bushy brows. Her heart sank. What had happened to make him look like that?

"What is it?" she cried breathlessly, her rejected hands clasped piteously to her breast. "Damer! Is anything wrong?"

"Everything is wrong," he said in a tone that cut. "Come in here. I don't want a scene before the servants."

"But I'm not going to make a scene," she cried, looking at him in blank bewilderment. "I haven't the faintest idea what you mean."

Her lips quivered. She bit them to keep back the tears that sprang to her eyes, as she went into the drawing-room before him.

She had filled the great pottery jars with long branches of mimosa, whose sweetness scented the big room with a warm fragrance. A covered silver dish of Mahmud's little cakes stood on the tea-table, which bore a profusion of other dainties as well. There was an air of festivity about the whole place, which Pamela's white frock accentuated.

Now, in the heavy, painful silence that followed the closing of the door, it was as if someone had beaten down the welcoming hands, torn the flowers from the vases and trampled on them, scattered the little feast to the four winds.

"I am waiting for your explanation, Damer," said Pamela, with a dignity that cost her something to achieve.

"It is yours I am waiting for," he returned harshly. "Why did you send for Doran the minute my back was turned?"

Pamela opened wide blue eyes.

"But I didn't. I—"

"Don't trouble to deny it. I found his wire in the fireplace there. It must have been in answer to something. I didn't write to him."

"Of course I won't deny it. I did write to him the day, asking him to come down whenever he could spare the time. He wired that he would. I meant to tell you, but forgot. There are always people here. I never see you alone." She faced him, hurt and puzzled, her head held high, her eyes on his hard unrelenting face. She felt that it was for her to indict, not for him.

It was not possible that he could be jealous of Tim Doran. . . . The thing was unthinkable: unworthy both of him and of her. The whole episode, her checked welcome, this meaningless frigidity, seemed like a nightmare. They were two ordinary human beings, after all. Surely there must be some reasonable explanation of his extraordinary attitude.

Suddenly he shot a question at her, jerked irrelevantly from stiff lips.

"Pamela, do you still pretend ignorance of that Cornish episode?"

Pamela caught her breath. A ray of light slit the darkness. He had got on the track of the real story and it had hurt him. . . . Well, she was not going to lie to him for twenty promises. She would not give Dido away, but she was not going to lie. She had promised him that there should always be truth between them. That vow came first and held.

"No," she answered very low.

"Pamela," his voice roughened to an unbearable agony—"Were you the girl?"

Pamela spun round as if she had been shot. If a chair

had not been near her she would have collapsed on the floor, so absolutely did her legs give way beneath her.

"Damer, I could *kill* you for asking me such a question!" she said at last, in a tone vibrant with a passion he had never heard from her before.

He was answered. Even as the words left his lips he saw by the change in her face that there, at least, he had wronged her. However far the affair between her and Doran had gone she was not the heroine of that ugly episode. The first feeling of shame at the part he was playing pricked him in the midst of his relief. It was not a pleasant feeling.

"I'm sorry," he began rather awkwardly.

"Sorry?" echoed Pamela in a queer choked voice. "Sorry? That's rather funny, isn't it?" She began to laugh hysterically, catching her breath.

"Funny?" he echoed uncomfortably.

"Yes," she gasped. "You'd say you were sorry in just that tone if you'd spilt a cup of tea on my dress! You say it now when you've dealt me the cruellest insult any husband—oh, Damer, how could you? . . . How *could* you?" She hid her face against the back of the chair and broke into low, agonized sobbing.

The sound tore at his heart as he stood there, withdrawn, awkward, sensing her point of view for the first time. He had little knowledge of women, and a profound distrust of his own methods of dealing with them. He did not know what to do. He wanted to gather her into his arms, but was afraid to venture. It would have been his wisest course.

Pamela sobbed as if her heart was broken. She was wounded to the heart's core at the revelation of the abyss of infamy into which he had thrust her—her, his wife, who had shown him all the tenderest intimacies of her

virgin heart, who had given him the first bloom of her young love, untouched by any other.

Langrishe could stand it no longer. He went over and put his hand on her shoulder.

"Come, Pam, you mustn't cry like that."

She shook it off, as if his touch stung her.

"Don't come near me—don't touch me! I can't bear it!" she cried passionately.

He withdrew.

"Very well," he said stiffly. "I wanted to talk sensibly about you and Doran, but——"

"About Tim and me?" Pamela echoed stupidly, gulping down a sob. "What can you possibly have to say about Tim and me?"

"Only that I have seen for some time how things are between you. I—I'm not angry. I know you can't help it. I—I only want to help you."

He stopped. He was trying to live up to his code, but primitive man was making it very difficult for him.

Pamela sat up on the chair and looked at him as if she had never seen him before. For the moment it was a stranger who spoke to her—a cold, hard stranger with cold, hard eyes, who said impossible things in a hard, cold voice.

Cold—hard! Where was the Damer she had known and loved, who had never been either?

"May I ask what your wonderful discovery was?" she asked, in a voice that matched his own, her sobs dried by the white-hot fury that possessed her.

"Need I put it into words?" said Langrishe. "Doran knows that I know. He admitted it when I advised him to stay away."

Pamela stared at him. The nightmare seemed even more incredible than ever.

"I think you have all gone mad!" she gasped.

"Not mad," returned Langrishe hardly—"sane at last!"

"If that's your idea of sanity——" began Pamela, trembling suddenly.

"Can you deny that you and Doran——"

"I'm not going to deny anything," said Pamela, her lips set in a line that had not been there for many a long day. "If you consider me capable of—of what you accused me just now, it doesn't seem worth while."

"But Pamela——"

"No, it's no use. You've gone too far this time."

"I insist on having some sort of answer from you!"

"What sort of answer do you want? I should have thought our life together all these months would have been answer enough."

Langrishe moved uncomfortably. Her reproach hit hard. Shame pricked him again. He found no words.

Pamela's soft, hurt voice went on:

"I do you the justice to believe that you would not have thought of these vile suspicions of your own accord. I think I know whom I've got to thank for them, but if it had been the other way round, Damer, I shouldn't have believed anyone's word against you. No, not if the whole world had been on one side and you on the other!"

Her voice trembled towards the close, and she began to cry again, quietly, heart-brokenly, burying her face in her arms.

Langrishe came nearer to the forlorn figure in the chair.

"Pam, forgive me!"

He tried to put an arm round her.

"No, no! You mustn't touch me! Don't touch me! I can't bear it! You—you've killed all that!"

She got up from the chair, faced him for a moment, wild-eyed and pale, then ran quickly out of the room.

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE CLEAN CUT

"WE'VE got to have this out, Pamela."

"I suppose so," said Pamela dully.

For once Langrishe had refrained from bringing anyone home to luncheon, and he and Pamela faced each other over the débris of the meal.

"I prefer to talk in a room that does not smell of food," she said. "Let's go out on the terrace. When Hassan brings the coffee, you can say your say."

She rose, crossed the hall and the drawing-room, and went out through the French window without a backward glance. Langrishe, as he followed her in silence, could not help feeling a touch of admiration in the depths of his aching heart at the completeness of her poise. Here was a wonderful development from the fresh simplicity he had married! He did not realize that it was suffering as well as matrimony which had turned Pamela so completely from girl to woman.

A sleepless night had given each time for thought. Pamela, who felt that she had suffered as much as she could bear, was conscious only of a numb ache now. The Carey pride, in all its strength, had come to her rescue, and helped her to cover up her hurt. She felt wounded to the death, but whether it were the death of love, happiness, or only girlhood, she did not stop to analyse.

Damer's accusation, the mere possibility that for one moment he should deem her capable of conduct so con-

trary to all that he must know of her, struck at the very depths of her pride and love. She felt that she could never forgive him, never feel the same towards him again. She was too young to realize the resilience of youth, to remember that to-morrow lies beyond to-day, and that behind the blackest cloud the sun still is shining. There was no possible to-morrow for Pamela in her dark hour. Nothing but the torment and disillusion of to-day.

Langrishe faced the situation with a dumb bewilderment. He could not rid himself all at once of his carefully constructed theory—could not realize that Pamela and Doran were not, never had been, lovers. Pamela's attitude at once puzzled and angered him. He did not know how to combat it.

When Hassan had set their coffee on a little table between them, and padded softly away in his yellow slippers, they sat silently for a moment, not knowing where to begin.

A light breeze rustled the fronds of a group of young date-palms at the end of the terrace. Shy green bee-eaters flitted in and out among the long, wind-torn leaves of the bananas. A warm scent of mimosa was wafted across the river towards them, troubling Pamela with the remembrance of last night, and her happy little preparations for Damer's return. Her lips quivered suddenly at the thought of their swift frustration.

"You know you have denied nothing," Langrishe broke out suddenly. "I'm eating my heart out in misery for want of a word from you."

Pamela looked stonily at him.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself for asking it!"

"I'm a plain man, Pamela, and like plain words," he answered. "I've no use for hints or vague phrasing. If you can give me your word of honour that that Cornish

episode doesn't concern me in any way, it will suffice."

Pamela caught her breath. How could she give him the assurance he craved? Were they not all concerned in it? Did it not touch him vitally?

"I'm afraid I can't do that," she answered, very low. "It concerns me, in a way, but not—"

"Pamela, can't you be frank? Don't you see that it is death to me not to be able to trust you?"

"I see that it is death to me not to be trusted!" cried Pamela. "I give you my word of honour that I have never given you cause to distrust me! You must be content with that."

"You pretended before that you knew nothing about the Cornish episode. Now you admit knowledge. You gave different dates for your own visit."

"I did not. I said all along that it was last summer, meaning the one before this one. What's the use of arguing? We only go round and round in a circle, getting nowhere. If you think I love Tim, I do—"

"Ah!"

Langrishe drew in his breath sharply.

"But not in the way you imagine. Oh, 'tis you ought to know that! I love him as I loved Randall, my own brother. He cared for me in the same way."

"No."

"Indeed he did, Damer."

"No," jerked Langrishe again. "He admitted to me that he loved you before he went away at Christmas."

The man's dark face was convulsed. Drops of sweat stood out on his forehead. Pamela looked at him wonderingly, her heart quite untouched by pity. A hand of ice was on it. His words were inexplicable to her.

"I had forgotten that. I think you must both be mad," she said quietly. "I happen to know—"

She stopped abruptly, with an exclamation of despair. How could she clear herself without implicating Dido?

Langrishe looked quickly at her with a hope that died as it arose. What had she been going to say? Was there to be more evasion, more temporizing? He could not stand it. The clean cut must be made, and at once.

"This is an impossible situation," he said, with a hopeless gesture.

"I quite agree."

"The only way to end it is to send you home."

The solution was an unexpected one. Pamela gasped.

"Send me home?"

"Yes. It's the only thing to do. You and I can't stay on here as we are. You see that, don't you? I don't want an open breach. I believe in people keeping their mistakes to themselves and showing a decent front to the world. It will be better for us to be away from each other for a while. I'll get leave in August or September. We can talk things over again then. We'll have got away from them a bit by that time—be able to see them rather more clearly. Don't you agree?"

The curt sentences pattered like hail about Pamela, bewildering her.

Why was she being sent home? Was there no other way out? Suddenly she saw that there was not. It was the only way of ending the situation with dignity. A truce, a breathing-space, and then the patching together of the shattered shards of what had once been so beautiful. What then? At best, the cracks would always show.

She bent her head.

"I suppose I do. When do you want me to go?"

"Not just yet. Sir John Crooke is coming to stay here next week. You can't go till after his visit."

"No," said Pamela dully. "What about Dido? Is she to come with me?"

Suddenly Langrishe saw a vision of a house swept bare of all that had made it a home—an empty shell echoing with memories, haunted by the sound of happy voices and laughter, of young, running, welcoming feet. He felt that he could not face it.

"No. She can stay if she likes." He rose, pushed back his chair, and walked over to the parapet.

Pamela, to her own surprise, began to laugh. It was part of the irony of it all that Dido, through whose fault the whole imbroglio had arisen, should stay, while she, the innocent, the scapegoat, should be sent home in disgrace.

Langrishe turned sharply at the sound.

"What's the matter?"

"It's only—it's only," gasped Pamela, "that it seems so funny, so funny that I should go and Dido stay!"

"I must have lost my sense of humour, for I don't see anything funny in it," said Langrishe curtly as he went away, love, jealousy, distrust, shame, and an aching longing to take Pamela in his arms, warring within him.

If only she had been straight; if only she had been honest with him! But all these petty evasions, these futile subterfuges, blurred his belief in her crystal clarity. He must be able to trust whole-heartedly or not at all. Were there no really truthful women? Yes; Dido was straight. The thought of her restored belief in a discredited sex.

He had no idea of the storm of tears that shook Pamela after he had gone—shook and spent her with a flood of feeling.

When it was over she dried her eyes and gave herself a mental shake.

"This is the last shower," she told herself. "Positively the last. I can't afford to cry any more. It takes too much out of me. Even if my heart is broken, it's got to be covered up decently. No one must ever see the crack. Not even Damer."

Her lips quivered at thought of him. She bit them hard to still their trembling. It was fortunate for her that she had a sufficient sense of humour to see the comic side of the situation, or the unfairness of it all would have overpowered her.

"Dido steals the fruit; I don't even look over the garden wall," she mused. "Yet she gets off scot free, while I'm punished. What's the meaning of it all? Is there any use in being straight and decent and honest? Is there any use in playing fair? Who knows? Who cares? Why don't I lie and snatch and steal, and then say I won't pay, as Dido did?" Her own conscience quickly supplied the answer. "I know—I care. To do other than what I've done wouldn't be playing the game. So long as one does that, what does it matter who pays? Now I think my eyes are sufficiently respectable to be able to dash past Hassan if I meet him on my way upstairs."

She rose and made her way to her room unobserved. She bathed her eyes and forehead with cool water and eau-de-Cologne, and lay down on her bed to try to snatch some sleep.

She felt as if at last her feet touched the bedrock of what she might be called upon to suffer. Damer was sending her away. Their life together had been a failure. *He did not trust her.* That, of itself, showed the depth

of the failure, if, after all she had been to him, all she had shown him of her innermost heart, he could have imagined for one instant that she was as base as he thought.

She dropped to sleep for a little while, waking first to that blessed unconsciousness of unhappiness which is slumber's best boon, then gradually remembering. Yet, with her sleep a sort of fatalistic calm had come to her. She felt a new strength, a new courage with which to face her little world.

"I've been hurt as much as I can be. I'm not going to be hurt any more now," she told herself childishly. "Truth echoes truth. Damer will know some day that I couldn't lie to him any more than I could lie to myself, and then he'll be sorry."

CHAPTER XL

TRIO

SHE dressed and went downstairs, to find that it was already tea-time. No matter what profundities disturb one's inner life, the outward current must flow on unmoved. Breakfast, luncheon, tea and dinner were as inevitable in their order as the progression of day and night. Conventions must be observed, whether one's heart were broken or not.

It was with a slight sense of relief that Pamela heard the sound of more than one set of footsteps in the hall. In the brief interval between hearing and sight her mind leaped quickly backwards.

"Has this been going on ever since Christmas, then?" she thought. "Has Damer been afraid all this time of being left alone with me? Is this why he has always buttressed himself with these men? To have someone between us? Why?"

She had a chilly, frightened little feeling as she rose to give her hand to Jim Durrant, Langrishe's present buckler against a *tête-à-tête*.

"You're not looking very fit, Mrs. Langrishe," Durrant said, peering at her over his glasses. "What have you been doing with yourself?"

"Nothing much," returned Pamela, suddenly finding speech easy. "Just the usual routine."

"She's been feeling the heat a bit," said Langrishe in his abrupt way. "I'm half thinking of sending her home before the weather really stokes up."

"Ah, Monica will be disappointed. She's keeping the kiddies out here this summer, and was looking forward to having your company, Mrs. Langrishe. It's all right here, really, and quite bearable, if you take proper precautions."

"We'll see," said Langrishe.

Pamela looked at him for signs of relenting, but saw none, so concluded that his apparent concession was only a figure of speech.

Her early training as eldest daughter at Carrigrennan stood her in good stead now. She found that she was able to talk fluently about nothing at all, and keep the ball of conversation rolling, in spite of the fact that her inner world, which was her real one, had crumbled about her ears.

It was easy enough, once one had got the trick of it. She and Langrishe were well-bred people, and played their little tragi-comedy daily for Hassan's benefit. There was a sufficiency of interest in their everyday life to provide safe topics of conversation. Outwardly all was unchanged, except that Langrishe now slept in the smaller spare room. Inwardly nothing was as it had been.

They met, they touched nowhere, these two who had once drawn so close together that they had almost welded in the perfect unity of married life. The golden glow of their love, which had illumined their world and lent a glamour to the merest triviality, had suddenly been withdrawn. They now walked in a garish day, beneath a pitiless light which revealed every flaw, every imperfection, in what before had seemed but dearly human. The petty round loomed mountainous, unsweetened by the touch of what had made each trivial duty a joy.

To add to the sense of oppression which weighted the

days, the great Moslem fast of the month of Ramadan started on its uncomfortable course.

It was Hassan who first told Pamela about it.

"Thirty days fast, Hassan?" she said in surprise.

"Yes, *ya sitt*. From sunrise to sunset during the month of Ramadan the true believer may neither eat nor drink nor smoke. He may not wet his lips with a drop of water. He must not even swallow his saliva."

"When may he eat, then?"

"While it is too dark to distinguish between a black thread and a white. Only then may he feast, *ya sitt*." It was the Arab's poetical way of indicating the hours between sunset and sunrise.

Pamela, like most Egyptian housewives, soon found that Hassan's phrase, "too fast," was no hyperbole. All day long the drowsy, hungry servants slept or crawled reluctantly through their duties. When the sunset gun announced to the faithful that the hours of fasting were over for the moment, feasting and revelling began.

The house on the river bank was pleasantly far removed from the noise of the town, where drums beat a welcome to the coming of night, pipes shrilled rejoicing, crackers were sent off, and shouting and laughter prevailed during the hours of darkness. Night was given over to eating and merrymaking until such time as the black thread and the white became once more distinguishable. Then the replete and lethargic servants snatched what repose they could from the uncomfortable day.

It was unfortunate that Ramadan should have synchronized with Sir John Crooke's visit, but the eminent contractor was in holiday mood and in the humour to be pleased with everything. The Arab servants, who,

unlike most English ones, loved company, brightened at his coming.

Small, stout, with a well-curved waistcoat and bright, darting eyes, Sir John Crooke reminded Pamela irresistibly of a sparrow. He pounced on stray admissions as alertly as that bird does on crumbs. Nothing escaped his quick glance.

It was on the second day of his visit, while Pamela sat on the terrace waiting for her house-party to return for tea, that the unexpected happened.

She was lying in a long cane chair, her hands for once idle in her lap, her eyes fixed on the glowing amber hills across the water, when a firm, light step behind her roused her from her reverie.

She turned quickly, to see Raoul de Marsac.

"M. de Marsac! What a surprise!" she cried, rising and holding out her hand.

He held it for a moment, then kissed it.

"Chère Madame, it is good to see you again! Good to be back in Egypt, to see the real sun!"

In spite of the slight theatricality of his words, sincerity rang in his tone. His mobile, dark face was alight with eagerness as he stood there bareheaded in the afternoon sunshine.

He had altered a little, she thought as she looked at him. He seemed at once older and younger than when he had left El-Armut; more purposeful, more alert. She could not quite define the change, but it was there.

"I have had a family bereavement, since I saw you last," de Marsac said, drawing a chair close to Pamela. "I have lost my father."

"Oh, I'm sorry," said Pamela, thinking suddenly of her own father and all that his death might mean.

"He was an old man, and had been in ill-health for

long. Still, death is a blow, no matter how well-prepared for it one may be. I am glad that I got to Paris in time. My mother and my little sister——” He paused. “But I must not sadden you with my troubles.”

“If one may not talk to a friend——” Pamela began.

“Am I, then, to consider you as my friend?” he interrupted eagerly.

“But, of course, M. de Marsac.”

“I mean it literally, not in the light, conventional sense,” de Marsac continued.

“I hope that I mean it in the same way,” said Pamela, with dignity, wondering what he was going to say.

“You and Mr. Langrishe have always been kindness itself to me. I was desolate that I had not time to come to see you before I left El-Armut.”

“The snake-bite? Are you quite well?”

“Quite well. I had almost forgotten it.”

He glanced down at a little scar on his wrist, and smiled.

“We shall never forget it. Dido will never forget it,” said Pamela, on an impulse.

At mention of the girl’s name, de Marsac seemed to tauten like a drawn bow-string, almost to vibrate.

“Ah, *la p’tite mademoiselle!* How is she?” he breathed, rather low.

“She is very well, thank you. She is up in Luxor at present, with Mrs. Waring.”

“In Luxor?”

The string relaxed, slackened.

“Yes. She is having a very good time there.”

“Naturally. She is of a chic—a charm——”

He stopped abruptly.

Pamela took her courage in both hands.

“M. de Marsac, Dido is very young. It is a good thing

that she should see as much of the world as possible before——”

“But it is I who must show it to her. I who speak to you, no other. Madame, this is all very unconventional. I should address myself to her father first, and get his permission to speak, but what you tell me sets my blood on fire. I cannot wait. I cannot bear to think of her there in Luxor, surrounded as always. I must go. I can catch the five o’clock train. You will tell me where she stays?”

The hot words poured out in a torrent. De Marsac had risen. Pamela rose, too, and faced him. He looked pale, and there was a strange fire in his eyes. The bow-string had tautened once more. It sang its own undeniable note at the mention of Dido’s name.

Pamela laid her hand on his arm.

“There is still plenty of time,” she said. “It is not half-past four yet. Hassan will take your things to the station.”

“I have my own man. He is at the hotel. I have made no arrangements. I came here first.”

“M. de Marsac, what do you want with Dido?”

Pamela felt that she was blunt, even coarse, in putting such a question, but she must know where she stood.

“I want to ask her to marry me, naturally. Mr. Langrishe must pardon me that I do not go to him first. But I cannot wait. You understand, chère madame? You will explain?” He seized Pamela’s hands and kissed them both, one after the other. “You will wish me good fortune?”

She felt a little thrill, half of pity, half of envy.

“Yes, indeed, I wish you good fortune,” she said gently. “Dido is staying at the Winter Palace Hotel.”

He was gone, leaving a troubled stir behind him. A

few minutes later Langrishe and Sir John Crooke came out on the terrace. Pamela braced herself for the usual platitudes, and chattered inanely, as she thought herself, while she poured out tea, remembering her guest's three lumps of sugar.

"Was that de Marsac I caught sight of leaving the house just as we were coming along?" Langrishe asked, during a pause in the flow.

Pamela looked at him curiously before she answered. Was he going to be jealous of M. de Marsac now? That would be a little too much!

"Yes," she returned quietly. "It was a most unexpected visit. His father is dead, and I fancy he has come back here to settle up his affairs."

"Why didn't you make him stay to tea?"

"He couldn't. He was in a hurry. He was going to Luxor."

"To Luxor?"

"Yes," returned Pamela significantly.

Surely not even the blindest victim of jealousy could read an unlawful passion into such a precipitate flight.

She had a moment alone with Langrishe later—a rare occurrence. She seized it desperately, lest he should elude her before it vanished.

"Damer, do you know why M. de Marsac went off to Luxor in such a hurry?" she asked.

"No. Do you?"

Langrishe bent a keen look on her.

"I do. He asked me to explain matters to you."

"To explain matters to me! What has it to do with me?"

Langrishe gazed at her in surprise. De Marsac seemed very much detached from their personal affairs.

"It may have a good deal." Pamela was not going

to beat about the bush. "He wants to marry Dido."

"To marry Dido!"

Langrishe sat down heavily on the parapet and looked at her in amazement. Such an idea had never entered his head. He found it difficult to credit it even now.

"Yes. He wouldn't wait. He has gone straight off to ask her."

"But it's absurd! Dido is a child. Besides, she'd never look at a Frenchman."

"Oh, don't be so insular, Damer. Dido is not a child. I don't believe she ever was a child. She's a woman, and she will do just as she likes in the matter."

Langrishe was silent, pondering this new and not altogether pleasant idea. Dido and the Frenchman! Dido, his little girl—

"You think there's something in it?" he said at last.

"I think there's everything in it."

"Do you mean that she wants to marry him?"

"Where have your eyes been that you haven't seen that the girl was head-over-ears in love for him for weeks past?"

"With de Marsac? My little girl! In love with de Marsac?"

"Yes, your little girl in love with de Marsac," repeated Pamela, in rather a peculiar tone.

The tenderness in Damer's voice when he spoke of Dido exasperated her almost beyond endurance.

CHAPTER XLI

TRIUMPHAL RETURN

SIR JOHN CROOKE had gone, and the servants lapsed once more into their usual Ramadan sleepiness and irritation. The first of the *khamasins*—the hot spring winds that sweep across Egypt with fiery breath—raged round the house on the river bank.

The glass windows were shut to keep out the fine sand that filtered through in spite of all precautions. The green sun-shutters were closed to bar the sunlight's entrance. Not that there was much of the sun to be seen during the *khamasin*. His rays were obscured by the hot, yellow swirl of the sandstorm.

When Langrishe, in the courteous tone of one complete stranger to another, politely thanked Pamela for all the trouble she had taken to make Sir John Crooke's stay a success, she felt that she would rather he had sworn at her. Even vicarious violence would have been a relief. She herself longed to scream at him, to shake him, to do anything that would shatter his cold politeness. Instead she only looked at him with a detachment that matched his own.

“He was our guest. What else could I do?”

Surely Damer must know that his code of hospitality was hers. She had never failed in that respect yet. Indeed she did not yet know how or where she had failed. She wondered about it with an aching unquiet. She had assured him on her word of honour that she had never given him cause to distrust her. If he believed Mrs.

Waring's hints and innuendoes rather than her word and his own knowledge of her—she shrugged her shoulders and turned away.

Langrishe's eyes rested on her hungrily. To him also life was torment just then: all natural instincts curbed.

"Pamela, you must let me thank you. The whole visit was a huge success, business as well as personal. The latter part was all your doing."

She thrust aside praise that once would have been so sweet, but now was absolutely savourless. "Oh, no, Damer. You are an excellent host yourself."

"But you—" he began, when there was a confusion of sound in the hall outside, a flutter of arrival, a scurry of feet. The drawing-room door was flung open and Dido, in a long cream coat with a cream veil twisted round her head, ran into the room. De Marsac stood on the threshold behind her, half tentative, half possessive, wholly triumphant.

"You dear people," she cried gaily. "Kiss me before I literally turn into a sand-heap."

She gave Pamela a hasty embrace, then flung herself into her father's arms.

Langrishe was surprised at the rush of feeling which overpowered him at the touch of the small face against his, the close clasp of the clinging arms. All the fatherhood in him rose at sight and touch of his child, unseen all these weary weeks: how weary he had scarcely realized until now.

She was his, his own, the one human being in his intimate life who had never failed or disappointed him. It was good to have her back again, good to see her vivid little face, to hear her gay light voice, to feel her butterfly kiss on his cheek.

He did not see de Marsac until Dido disengaged herself

from him and turned towards her lover with a new little air of shyness.

"Raoul, where are you?" She took his hand and led him up to her father. Her head just reached his shoulder. She leaned back against it as if she drew strength from the contact.

"Be nice to each other, my two men," she commanded, looking up at Langrishe. "Raoul and I are going to get married, Dad."

"Well, 'pon my word," Langrishe began.

"I have a thousand apologies to make, monsieur," de Marsac said at the same moment.

"I think, de Marsac, that you and I had better talk this matter over in my office."

"I am at your service, monsieur."

"Come along, then."

De Marsac took Dido's hand and kissed it. She looked after the two men adoringly as they went out of the room together.

"Aren't they lambs?" she said dreamily. Then she turned to Pamela and caught her hands. "Oh, Mammy Pam, I'm so happy that I don't know whether I'm on my head or my heels. I want to sing! I want to scream with joy! I want to dance!"

She whirled Pamela round and round in a wild maze until they sank together breathless on the couch.

Pamela felt immeasurably old, immeasurably sad in the face of such youthful exuberance. Yet once, too, and not so very long ago, she had felt just like that, just as radiant, just as happy.

"What if your father doesn't consent?"

"He will consent. There's nothing against it. It's too wonderful, Pam." Dido went on in a soft voice. "To think that Raoul should have chosen me out of all the

other women in the world! I can scarcely believe it even yet." All the humility of real love rang in her tone.

"Well, child, I hope you'll be very, very happy," said Pamela, rising and walking restlessly to the darkened window. "I like M. de Marsac, and he seems to be genuinely in love with you."

"Oh, you dear prim, creature! Genuinely in love indeed! Love is a fire, a flame, a spirit, a tornado! What do you know of love?"

"Not much, I'm afraid," answered Pamela, without turning round.

Something in her tone pierced the girl's self-absorption. She ran to the window, caught Pamela by the shoulders and twisted her round.

"What's the matter, Mammy Pam?" she cried. "I haven't been able to see your face properly in this dark room, but your voice sounds all wrong."

Pamela managed quite a credible laugh. "It's the *khamasin*. It upsets people's nerves, you know. And we've just had rather a fussy time with Sir John Crooke's visit. He left only to-day. It's the Ramadan fast too, and the servants are stupid and irritable. They sleep all day and eat all night, which of course upsets their digestions."

"Three topping reasons, and not one of them the right one! I'll have to wait until the lamps are lighted to have a good look at you. I believe Dad has been beating you, you're so subdued."

"How did you guess?" asked Pamela, with difficult lightness. "Husbands in El-Armut always beat their wives during Ramadan."

"It's good for the wives but bad for the husbands," declared Dido. "However, I've certainly seen some women for whom the stick seems the only treatment."

"Dear me, how primitive we're getting!"

"The desert influence," murmured Dido. "Raoul and I are going to spend our honeymoon in tents."

"You've made plans already?"

"Why not? We're not going to waste any time. We're going to be married as soon as we can. There's nothing to wait for. We know our own minds. I have my mother's money and Raoul has plenty of his own."

"What about clothes?"

"I've stacks of them. If I want anything else I can easily run down to Cairo and get it. But I don't."

"There's nothing like having one's plans cut and dried," said Pamela, with a queer little smile. "You seem to have lost no time in making yours."

"Why should we?" cried Dido. "I'm afraid we rather shocked our Louisa, but that doesn't trouble me much."

No, nothing would trouble her much, Pamela decided. She was wrapped in a roseate mist of happy isolation from her surroundings, a mist through which she and one other walked hand in hand in mutual absorption. How long would it last, Pamela wondered dully. Had they anything solid to build their house of happiness upon, or would they find when the mist dispersed that they had forgotten to build anything at all? She had thought that her own house was stout and stormproof, and lo, she found it was but a draughty shed through which the winds blew coldly. There was no use in asking Dido if she knew what she was doing. The glamour was upon her. She could not see clearly. Perhaps it was as well. If one always saw clearly beforehand probably no one would marry at all, she told herself bitterly. Let Dido stay in her Fool's Paradise as long as she could! She would not be the one to hunt her out of it.

"Mrs. Waring does well to be shocked," she said, after

a pause. "Perhaps it would shock her even more if she could see herself as others see her."

"Why? How do you see her?" asked Dido, with a quick glance.

"I see her as an evil, mischief-making woman," returned Pamela, slowly. "A woman who tries to blacken your reputation even while she's eating your bread and salt."

"Pam! What do you mean?" cried Dido rather breathlessly.

The door opened and Langrishe looked in. His face was still grim, but his eyes softened as they rested on his daughter.

"Come here, little girl. I want you in the office for a minute."

Dido jumped up, and ran to him, slipping her hand through his arm. "Have you been nice to Raoul, Dad? I'll never forgive you if you haven't."

"How can I be nice to the bandit who's going to rob me of my child?" said Langrishe tenderly.

Dido laughed.

They went away together, closing the door behind them, forgetting Pamela in the engrossment in each other.

She sat down suddenly in one of the big chairs, drumming on its arms with restless fingers. She felt as if she were a prisoner in that dark airless room. Shut away from all life's joys and beauty. Heloise Waring had drawn her magic circle well. Even though she did not stand within it herself now, she had made it strong and fast enough to keep Pamela out.

She felt stifled. With a wild glance round the room which she had worked so hard to beautify, she got up and left it.

She crossed the hall almost on tiptoe lest she should

disturb the conclave behind the closed office door; the family council from which she was deliberately excluded.

She went up to her room and sat on the edge of her bed, wondering dully how much longer she could bear it.

CHAPTER XLII

DIDO OFFERS PAYMENT

THAT evening there was feasting in the house by the river-bank, as well as in the town of El-Armut.

Pamela arranged white roses in her remaining gold-shot Venetian vases for the betrothal dinner-table, and reft strips of golden tissue from an evening dress for its further adornment. She put her cherished high-stemmed Waterford glass dish in the centre, piled with Dido's favourite *Yussuf Effendi* oranges, among which she scattered a handful of their own fragrant blossoms. For in Egypt, blossom and fruit are to be seen at once on the same tree; promise and fulfilment meet for the bridal.

Then she went to change her dress with a heart as heavy as lead. Dido's insouciance made her feel old, stupid, and unutterably weary. Her brain whirled at the easy way in which the girl dismissed vital problems and swept aside everything that seemed to stand in the path of her own happiness. Nothing else appeared to matter.

Perhaps it didn't, Pamela thought. Perhaps Dido was right to take her happiness when she could. She might not get the chance again.

She was ready early. There was no pleasant lingering now for a word with her husband, no intimate interchange of the various little events of the day. Damer used the dressing-room altogether and never entered her room at all.

The situation was fast becoming intolerable to him also. Pamela's repudiation of him, her hurt shrinking from his

touch, had wounded him more cruelly than she had any conception of. Reticent always, he withdrew more than ever into himself, and let the wound fester where it should have been cleansed and healed.

If Pamela had ceased to care for him, if she shuddered even at his touch, that must mean that she loved another man, in spite of all her protestations to the contrary. The obsession held, rankling bitterly.

Now Dido was leaving him too. She was marrying a man of whom his insular prejudices did not altogether approve. . . . Not that there was anything really against de Marsac. He seemed a decent enough chap, and it was easily seen that he adored Dido. Still . . . Why couldn't she have fallen in love with a man of her own nationality? Young Welland, for instance, or even—Doran? Yes, if Doran and she had only taken a fancy to each other there need have been none of this coil.

He sighed heavily as he tied his tie, and paused for a moment to listen to Pamela's movements as she went to and fro about her own room. Then he heard the door open and the sound of her footsteps along the corridor. He stood still until they died away, frowning until his brows met above unhappy eyes.

Early as Pamela was, Dido was downstairs before her. All the lamps in the drawing-room were lit, and the room was suffused with a golden glow. Tall spaces of star-sown blue showed where the French windows stood open to let in the suddenly cooled night air.

The *khamasin* was over, and the sky was clear once more. It had been more of a menace than a performance: a foretaste of the three-day storms which were yet to come. Dido flitted from window to door, from couch to chair, restless, brilliant as some darting golden humming-bird.

"Raoul said he'd be early and he hasn't come yet," she cried as Pamela entered. "Can anything have happened?"

"I don't think it's half-past seven yet," Pamela answered. "He'll probably be here in a minute. Sit down and tell me how the interview went off."

Dido looked at her curiously. "Why I was counting on you to tell me what Dad had said!"

"I haven't seen him since he went up to dress."

"You haven't? . . . Pam, what's wrong? Oh, don't fence with me and tell me it's nothing. I'm not blind and I can see that you're looking awful. Dad's not himself either. He's got quite thin. What has happened? Surely you haven't quarreled?"

"N—no. I don't think we've quarreled," answered Pamela slowly, as if she were weighing out each word.

"Then what is it? I know there's something wrong. Dad said something about your going home. The last arrangement was that we were both going to stay out here for the summer."

"Oh, you may stay. . . . I've got to go."

"I'd have stayed in any case, but why have you got to go?"

"It's better. We've arranged it. The heat——"

"Tosh! Please remember that I'm not a baby, Pam. I know far more about the world than you do."

"Probably."

Dido pursued her train of thought, regardless of trespassing. "Another thing, too. Why does Dad sleep in the spare room now? I looked in there and saw his things."

Pamela flushed hotly. "Please leave our private affairs alone, Dido. They don't concern you."

"I'm beginning to think they do," answered Dido, in a queer tone. "Pam, are you by any chance paying for—what I did?"

Pamela looked at her sharply.

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I say. I've been putting the thought away from me ever since I came home, but it's no use. It's there. It won't let me rest. . . . Pam, you must tell me. Are you suffering in any way for my idiotic affair with Tubby Doran?"

"What makes you think that?"

"One of my intuitions, I suppose. Just because it's the odious, tormenting sort of thing that would crop up just when I'm beginning to be so happy! Tell me, Pam. Has Heloise been making mischief? She tried to pour her poison about you and Tubby into my unwilling ear. She even hinted that it was you who had been in Cornwall with him!" Dido's voice was strained and uncomfortable, her cheeks hotly flushed. "I said I was sure it wasn't you, but I couldn't tell her the truth, could I? I might as well have put it in the daily papers. She'd have told everybody."

"She has told enough people, as it is," said Pamela hardly.

"Who has she told?"

"Your father."

"That it was you?"

Pamela nodded. She could not speak.

Dido bit her lip.

"But surely he didn't believe it? He couldn't."

"He believed—some of it." Even the admission hurt.

"How much?"

"He—he believed that Tim and I were in love with each

other." She could not voice the whole bitter truth.

"But didn't you tell him you weren't?" cried Dido eagerly, clasping and unclasping her hands.

"Of course I did. But it didn't seem to matter. He had some mad idea that Tim admitted to him that he cared for me. I can't understand it." Pamela spoke hopelessly, tonelessly.

"Why didn't you tell him that Tubby cared for me?"

Pamela looked at her in surprise. "Didn't I promise you I wouldn't? Sure, if I'd told him that, it would have set him off on the track of the whole thing!"

"Oh, Mammy Pam, what a dear fool you are!" cried Dido, ruefully. "I'll have to tell him myself now, just at this most inopportune moment."

"Ah, but you needn't," said Pamela, making her final sacrifice. "Don't tell him. 'Twill hurt him, Dido."

"I can't help that. He shouldn't have been such a fool as to believe Heloise's lies," returned Dido, hardly.

"I can't imagine how he could, knowing you. But men are idiots!"

"That was what hurt most," said Pamela, very slow.

"To think he could believe—"

The door opened to admit de Marsac, handsome and distinguished in his evening dress. His eyes sought and found Dido's at once. She ran to him. "Raoul, I thought you were never coming," she cried. "What makes you so late?"

De Marsac looked down with a little thrill of triumph at the wild bird which he had tamed to his hand.

"Every moment away from you seems an hour, *ma mie*," he returned. "I was afraid to seem too impatient." Then in a louder tone: "Present me in form to *ma belle-mère*. She has been very kind to me."

"She's kind to everyone," said Dido, in a half-grudging, half-rebellious tone.

She felt very resentful of the cloud on her new-found happiness, very reluctant to pay anything now for the fruit in secret and long forgotten. Inherited qualities warred with fostered inclination with disturbing results. Dido did not like being made to think of anyone but herself.

"You have given your consent too?" de Marsac was saying to Pamela, as he bent over her hand.

"Is it necessary, Monsieur?" she asked smiling. "I think that my congratulations are all that are required now."

"I have those, then?"

"Most warmly," Pamela returned.

Dido looked quickly round as the door opened and her father came into the room. She scrutinized him closely. Yes, he had changed. He seemed older, thinner, grimmer. His step was heavier and his eyes had lost their boyish twinkle.

Her heart sank. Would her confession add to his burden, or lighten it. She wished that she knew. Why was everything so mixed? Why could she not enjoy her happiness unalloyed?

All through the surface sparkle of the little dinner-party a note of warning sounded in her ears. Bitterly now did she regret her bygone folly. Her stolen fruit had been but Dead Sea Apples, savourless from the first. No, decidedly it had not been worth what it had, what it might yet cost What a little fool she had been!

But up to this, she reminded herself, it was Pamela who had paid, Pamela who was still paying, although she had no more to do with it than her father himself. The first glimmer of moral obligation came to her with the

thought. . . . One cannot do wrong and suffer alone. It is like a stone cast in a pool: one never knows who may not be touched by the recurrent widening circles of one thoughtless action. She had imagined that she and Doran would have been the only people who could possibly be affected by their escapade, and now, here were her father and Pam involved—perhaps Raoul, too! Ah, no! She beat away the thought. Raoul must be kept out of it. The widening circles must not touch him.

Healths were drunk in champagne. There was a well sustained air of festivity throughout the meal which all but one of the party knew to be artificial.

And yet Pamela's gaiety was not altogether forced. A little bell of hope rang in her heart. A glimmering of dawn appeared on her dark horizon. If only Dido kept her word and told the truth to Damer, who knew what might happen?

After coffee the lovers went out on the terrace.

"I want to show Raoul my view," said Dido, slipping her arm through his.

"Take care that you don't catch cold, child," warned Langrishe, a prey to the mingled feelings of the parent who has just given his child to another man.

"Lovers never catch cold," declared Dido, smiling.

As she went out she cast a swift, uncomfortable glance at the two she was leaving: Pamela in one corner of the couch, her father in his big chair, smoking his inevitable cigar.

Why did they look so determinedly aloof from one another, spoiling her exquisite hour? Why could they not have been sensible, and gone on their happy humdrum way without minding Heloise Waring's lies?

As they stepped out into a warm, scented darkness lit by large trembling stars, a silver slip of moon swept

into sight in a rift of deep blue sky between two tufted palms. Dido turned to de Marsac.

"Kiss me! Love me! Make me forget everything in the world but you!" she demanded, clinging to him suddenly.

He drew her close. His lips sought and found hers. She fired him as no other woman had power to do—this strange, wild, passionate, ageless child.

"Beloved, there is nothing in the world but our love," he murmured. "*Je t'adore!*"

At the touch of his passion her whole being flamed, fusing with his. She had the swift forgetfulness she desired, the absolute obliteration of all but love. The past had vanished, the future was still veiled. Only the ecstasy of the present remained.

A little owl hooted from the end of the garden—*hou-hou, hou-hou!*

Pamela, in the lamplit room heard it, remembering that other night when she had listened to its eerie cry.

Silence had fallen between the two indoors. Langrishe held a paper in his hand, but instinct told her he was not reading it. She listened to the slow puffing of his cigar, watched for it as one watches for a recurrent sound. Each time she heard the soft little noise she said to herself :

"Now I must speak. Now I must say something."

But she could think of nothing to say. The silence grew weighted, menacing. Pamela felt that she must break it, no matter with what triviality. At last she said in a tone that sounded unnatural. "What do you think of Dido's engagement?"

Langrishe took out his cigar and carefully knocked off the ash. "It's not what I'd have chosen for her." Speech was a relief to him as well.

"What would you have chosen?"

"A man of her own nationality, five years hence."

"Yes, that would have been soon enough."

"Too soon, really."

"Damer, we can't order other people's lives. We can only help them to the best of our ability. Dido's heart is set on this. There is no use in trying to thwart her."

"Not the least. From the time she could toddle she's always known what she wanted and got it. I wished for a long engagement. She won't hear of it. De Marsac says he wants to marry her as soon as possible. But I've held out for a month."

"A month?" echoed Pamela. "Will you really let them get married in a month?"

Langrishe smiled ruefully. "They got round me somehow. Dido is very specious. I'd given my consent almost before I knew it. I want the child to be happy."

"Of course," Pamela hastened to say, welcoming this brief semblance of companionship. "But a month seems such a short time."

"Let them be happy while they can," said Langrishe curtly. "They'll have all the rest of their lives to repent in."

His words struck Pamela with a personal application. She rose, with a quick hand to her breast.

"Damer! You don't mean that? You don't think they'll repent?"

"Most people do, don't they? Sit down, Pamela, and let us talk business. This wedding puts a stopper on your going home for the present, I suppose. Do you think that you can stand the heat for a month or so longer?"

Pamela bit her lip. "I think that I can stand the heat better than the cold," she faltered. "You—you chill me

to the heart's core with your dreadful politeness, Damer."

The swift attack found him unprepared. He started at her shaft, checked himself, stammered :

"You? I?" His cigar dropped from his fingers.

They faced each other silently, white and tense, seeking for words and finding none.

A voice from the open window startled them.

"Look here, you two, I can't have this!"

They turned to see Dido, a slim vision of white and gold, brilliant against the blue night without.

"Can't have what?" asked Langrishe abruptly.

The girl came forward a step or two.

"I can't have you spoiling my happiness with your nonsense," she returned, with an obviously assumed lightness.

"Come, Dido, don't go too far," warned Langrishe. "Our affairs have nothing to do with you. No one can spoil your happiness but yourself."

"That's true *Mon dieu*, that's true," she said in a frightened whisper. For an instant she seemed to shrink into herself and away from some terrifying vision. Then she pulled herself together and held her head high.

"Well, I can't help it if I spoil my happiness. I can't stick the thought that I may be spoiling yours."

"How could you possibly be spoiling ours? What do you mean?" asked Langrishe curtly.

Dido came closer and put out a warning hand.

"Hush. Speak low. I don't want Raoul to hear. . . . I mean this. I don't know what mad notion you've got into your head about Pam and Tubby Doran, but there's not one word of truth in it, from beginning to end."

Langrishe paled beneath his tan. Drops of sweat stood out on his forehead. Pamela shrank into her corner of

the couch, trembling, incapable of speech, feeling almost as if she were looking on at some scene in a play. Her heart rushed out to her husband. Even at the last moment she would have spared him if she could.

"What do you mean, Dido?" he asked again.

"I mean that he's in love with me, and with no one else," answered Dido decisively.

"But—that girl in Cornwall?"

"I was the girl in Cornwall," said Dido, very low.

"*You?*" The word was scarcely audible.

"Yes. I . . . Listen, Dad, there was nothing in it, really. It was folly. Nothing more. Pam will tell you the rest. I must go back to Raoul."

"No you don't." Langrishe's tone rang with command. "Come here, Dido. We've got to have this out. You also, Pamela. You're both in this conspiracy against me, it seems. . . . *You* knew too."

Pamela looked at him in dumb appeal, but said nothing. There seemed to be nothing to say. The thing had got beyond her control. It lay between father and daughter now. All her heart yearned over her man. He must feel as if his whole world had failed him, as if his house, too, were crumbling about his ears. She knew what that meant.

"There's no conspiracy. Don't be stupid," said Dido sullenly. "The Cornish episode was just a childish escapade. Pam found out about it quite by chance, and I made her promise not to tell. That's all."

"I'm afraid I don't understand. You say that you stayed alone in Cornwall with Doran? But you never met him until you came out here?" said Langrishe, in heavy astonishment.

"I did. I met him in town last spring."

"Then why did you conceal the fact?"

Langrishe bent heavy brows upon the small, defiant figure, who returned his gaze hardly. "It seems that I have been deceived and lied to all along . . . by those whom I trusted most."

He looked from Dido to Pamela in an agony of reproach. It was the bitterest moment of his life. Pamela could stand it no longer. She sprang to him and caught his arm.

"Damer, my man, I never lied to you. . . . Dido, tell him the whole story. You owe it to him," she cried passionately.

"I must send Raoul away first."

"It seems to me that his place is here," said Langrishe, his eyes still on Dido.

He did not look at Pamela, but he put one hand on the trembling ones that clasped his arm and held them as a drowning man may clutch a spar.

Dido cried vehemently: "No, Dad, no! Not to-night. I won't have Raoul told to-night. Let me tell you first. He has nothing to do with it. You must wait until I send him away."

"Very well. Send him away, then."

"Pam . . ." he began in a choked voice. "Pam . . ."

She waited for no more. Her arms were round his neck, her soft cheek against his hard one, her heart swelling with pity, love and tenderness.

"My own man! . . . My dear one! . . ." she murmured brokenly. "Oh, I am so sorry."

He held her so closely that it hurt.

"Pam. Can you ever forgive me?"

"My dearest, there's nothing to forgive. Sure, I love you!"

"But you wouldn't let me touch you. You shrank from me," he said incoherently.

"Ah, that was only for the moment. I never meant it, really."

"You didn't?"

"No more than you really meant that you believed——" her voice choked.

Langrishe, in his humiliation, wondered at his madness, his black blindness. Surely she was right. Surely in his innermost soul he had always believed in her truth and purity. Here, at least, was "a fixed star," shining above the other ruins.

"Pam, I know what the abomination of desolation means now," he whispered shamedly.

"So do I. . . . Oh, Damer—to have you back again? . . . What desert were we wandering in? I thought I'd have died."

"It's been hell," he said tersely.

"Yes. Distrust is worse than death," she answered. "But now we've got each other again. We're closer than ever. We'll never, never drift. Will we, my own man?"

"No." He strained her to him. "I didn't know what you meant to me until I thought I had lost you. Kiss me, my heart's core. I've been dying of thirst in my desert."

"You mustn't die if I can save you," said Pamela, with a happy little laugh. In that instant they tasted joy unalloyed, forgetting for the moment that in the cup of life sweet and bitter are inextricably mixed, the one tincturing the savour of the other.

Dido slipped along the terrace to where a red spark and white blur showed where her lover awaited her. She

went up to him, and putting her arm through his, leaned against him.

Her heart was beating madly. Was this the beginning of the end? Not if she could help it. She would fight to the death if need be, for her lover.

“Raoul, *mon ami*,” she murmured in her most honey-sweet tones. “I want you to be a darling and go now.”

“You are tired,” he said, throwing away his cigarette, and slipping his arm round her.

“No. It’s not that. The fact is—whisper.” She drew down his head to hers. “Things have gone a little bit crookedly with the two inside. I think I can put them straight. That’s why I want you to go. You can come as early as you like to-morrow.”

“*Mon ange, je t’adore!*” he cried, with a repetition which held no weariness for Dido. “How am I to endure all these hours without seeing you again?”

“Only a month more now,” she whispered, feeling as if she were flinging down a challenge to Fate.

“Only an eternity,” he groaned, as he kissed her.

CHAPTER XLIII

BITTER SWEET

"AND that's that," ended Dido on a note of defiance that quavered a little.

Her story was told in all its unlovely crudity, and she stood before her father to receive sentence. She was learning at last that the Tree of Knowledge was beset with thorns, and that those who pluck its fruit unlawfully must suffer from their sharpness sooner or later.

Langrishe looked at her almost as if he had never seen her before. In a sense he had not. He had always looked upon an idealized Dido, bright and sparkling, a little thoughtless, perhaps, like most young people, but crystal-clear, in her transparent honesty, hating deceit as he did himself, holding her standard of girlish purity high above a sordid world.

Now he flung to the other extreme and saw a shallow creature, hard and flippant, caring for nothing but her own amusement, lying, deceiving, cheating, in order to get it. He did not realize that in her tardy truth-telling Dido had reached the heights which she had never attained before. He only saw the virgin oriflamme trailing in the dust: the bloom of her precious reputation rubbed away by careless fingers, her very honour at the mercy of chance tongues.

It was a humiliating revelation, devastating in its destruction of cherished ideals.

"Well, what have you to say?" asked Dido, after a moment's silence.

"I don't know what to say," returned Langrishe heavily. "You have disappointed me bitterly, Dido, though I don't suppose you mind that."

Dido flushed. "I do, but I don't expect you to believe it. You've said yourself that you'd never trust a person who once deceived you."

"I was not thinking of my own daughter when I said that. I don't want to be hard on you, Dido, but—" He put out his hand and dropped it with a hopeless gesture. "Does Doran still care for you?"

"I believe he does in his own stupid way."

"You must marry him, then. It's the only thing to be done. He holds your honour in his hands."

Dido sprang forward with flaming cheeks. "He does nothing of the sort. I hold my honour in my own hands. I've done nothing to be really ashamed of. I wouldn't marry Tubby Doran if he were the last man in the world."

"Dido, you are very young. You can't possibly know your own mind."

"Haven't I always known my own mind?" Dido flashed.

"Not in the Doran affair evidently," returned Langrishe, with a touch of sternness. "God knows I don't want to coerce you into a loveless marriage, child, but it seems the only decent thing to do."

"It would be the most shamelessly indecent thing to do! Nothing in the world would induce me to marry Tubby." Suddenly her defiance broke. She ran across to the chair where Langrishe sat, chin on hand, and dropped on her knees by his side. "Dad, you won't insist on telling Raoul, will you? There is no reason why he should know. If I had done anything really wrong

I should tell him of it myself, but when I didn't—when it was only folly——”

Langrishe looked down at the bent gold head, his fatherhood warring with shattered pride and disillusion. Then his eyes met Pamela's..

“We've had enough of unnecessary misunderstandings, Damer,” she said gently. “We know how easy it is to make innocence look guilty. I really don't think M. de Marsac need know. . . . Perhaps Dido will tell him of it herself one day, when their love has grown strong enough to stand the test. After all, she needn't have told you unless she wanted to. She risked her own happiness for ours. We mustn't forget that.” The soft voice stopped suddenly.

Langrishe put his hand on Dido's head and spoke in a milder tone.

“Well, little girl, will you let it be a lesson to you if I promise to keep silence? Mind you, I'm violating my principles by doing so. I'm going against my conscience in——”

Dido flung her arms around his neck. “You dear old Dad!” she cried incoherently. “If you've nothing worse than that on your conscience they ought to canonize you! . . . I *am* sorry. I am indeed. I feel a beast when I think of all that you and Pam—— Why, what's the matter with Pam?”

Pamela had fallen in a crumpled heap along the couch. For the first time in her healthy young life she had fainted. They rushed to her, all else forgotten.

“Water, Dido, quick—and brandy!” cried Langrishe, lifting the prone form and laying it flat on the couch, fear tugging at his heart.

A moment later Pamela opened her eyes to see his agonized face bending over her.

"My darling, I thought you were dead," he cried.

She tried to rise, and leaned against him.

"I don't know what came over me. I never did such a thing in my life before," she said, feeling rather ashamed of her weakness.

"Here, drink this," Dido commanded, looking at her somewhat quizzically. "You behave with marvellous tact. You saved a decidedly awkward situation."

"Did I? I hope I won't be called upon to do it again," said Pamela, with a quavering smile.

"I hope not either," said Langrishe. "Do you feel well enough to get upstairs now? Shall I carry you?"

"Oh, no," she answered. "I'm really all right again, Damer. I expect it was the *khamasin*. I've been feeling rather funny all day."

"I haven't been looking after you properly," said Langrishe, ruefully. He put his arm round her and they went upstairs together, Dido following in their wake.

"Dido will stay with you until I come back," Langrishe said. "I must go down and put out the lamps."

Dido followed Pamela into her bedroom.

"Let me help you undress, Mammy Pam," she said with an unwonted gentleness. Then with one of her quick impulses she flung her arms round her stepmother. "You are a nice thing, Pam, in spite of your dreadful conscience," she whispered. "But I'm afraid you won't be able to stay out here for the summer, after all."

"Won't I? Why not?" asked Pamela, innocently.

"Oh, you goose! Do you mean to say you don't know what's the matter with you?" cried Dido. "I guessed almost from the first moment I saw you to-day."

"*Dido!*!" Pamela's face flushed rosily. Her eyes grew very bright. She sank on to the side of the bed. "Dido . . . !" She trembled suddenly.

"Wait and see!" advised Dido oracularly, sauntering out of the room as Langrishe came into it.

"What are you to wait and see?" he asked, going up to his wife with eager lover's eyes.

Pamela looked at him, then away again.

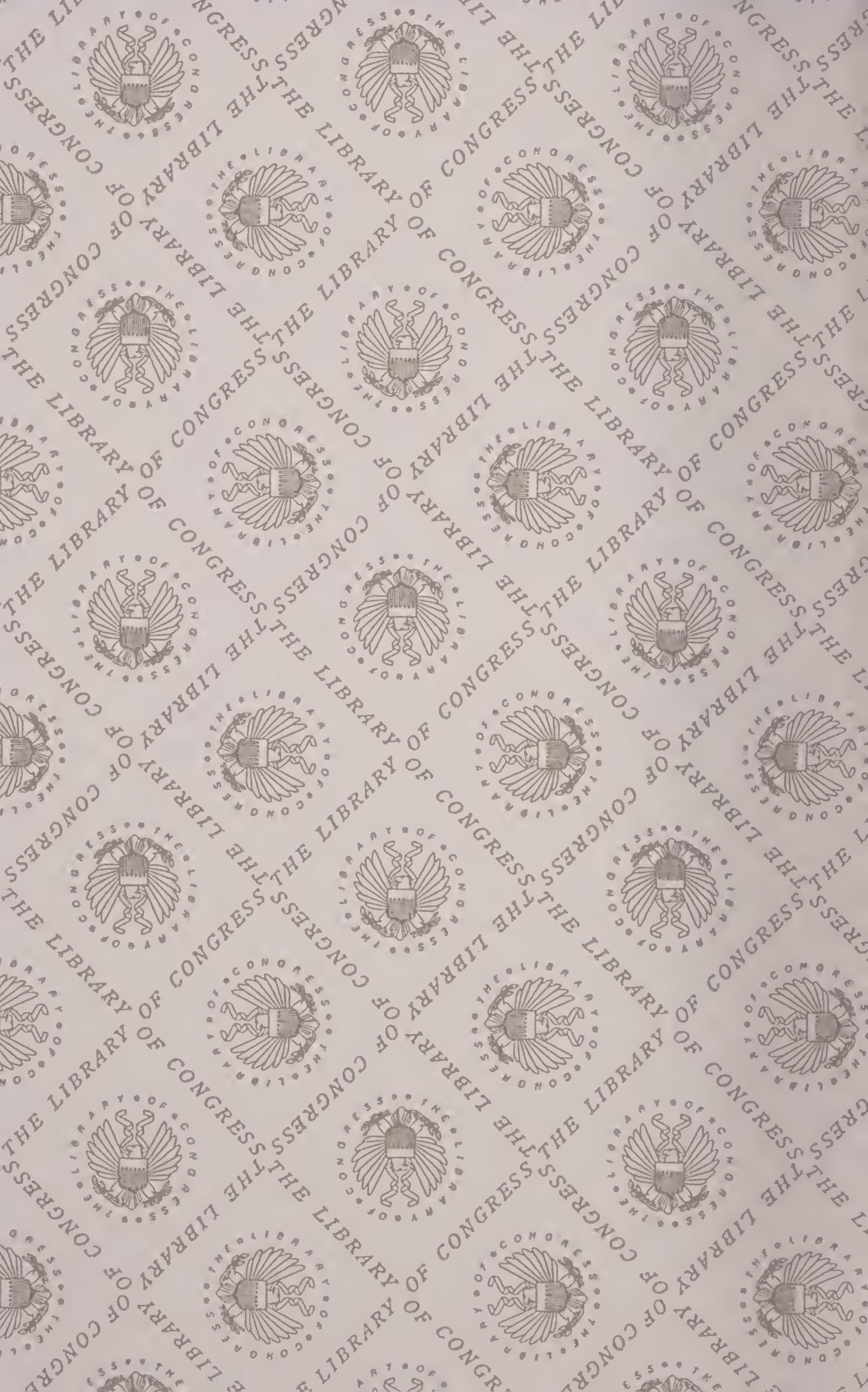
Suddenly courage came to her with the wonderful conviction that Dido was right. She held out her arms to him with a beautiful gesture.

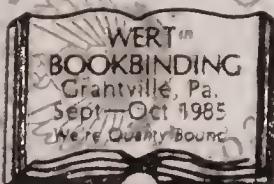
"Dido has discovered a secret. Come here and let me whisper it to you, my man."

He knelt beside her and put his arms around her, finding balm for his hurt.

She bent and whispered in his ear, as she held his head closely to her breast. Out of darkness they had come into light. They were one at last.

THE END





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